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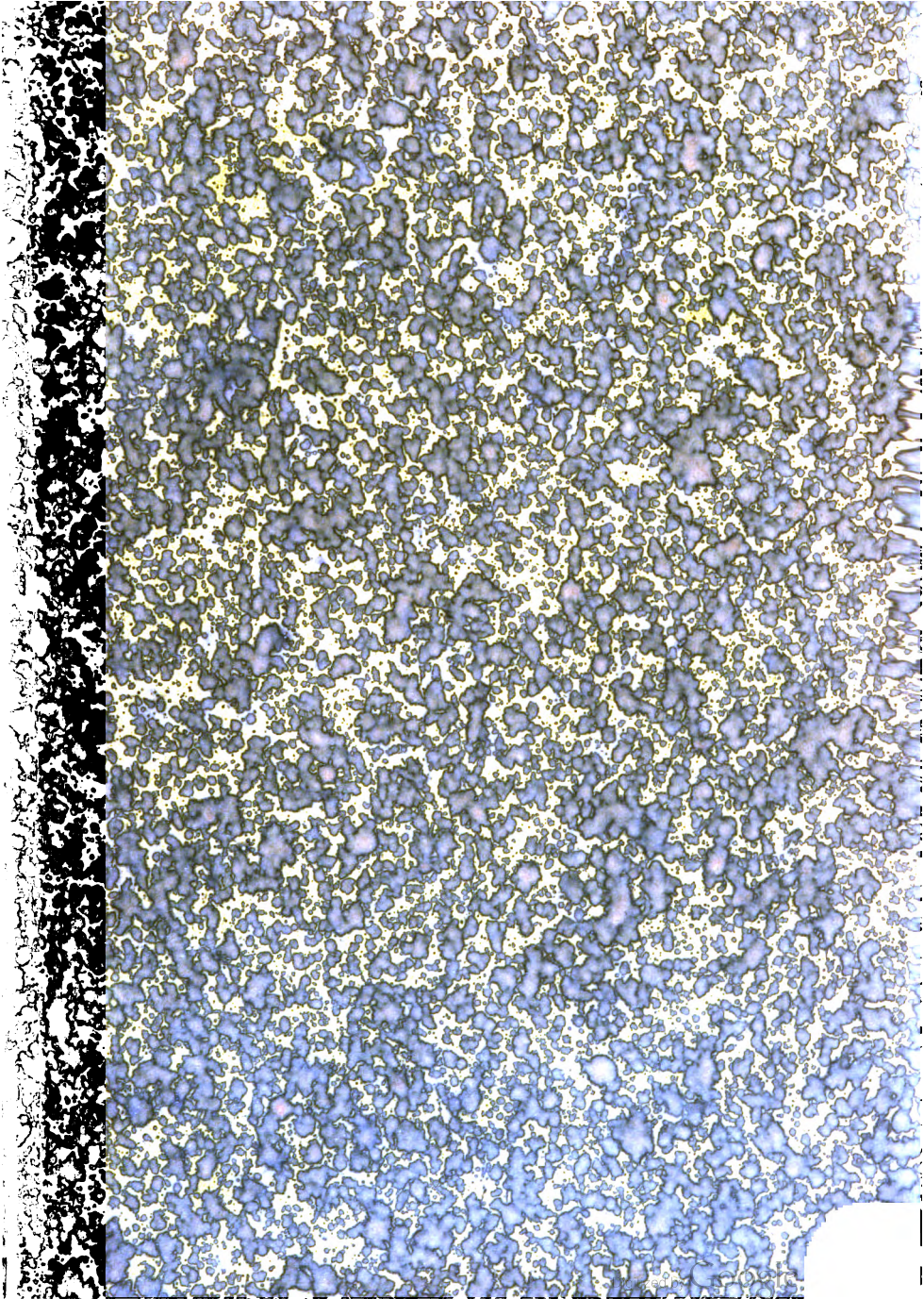
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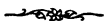
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*ILLUSTRATED BIOGRAPHIES OF
THE GREAT ARTISTS.*



JOHANN FRIEDRICH OVERBECK.



ILLUSTRATED BIOGRAPHIES OF THE GREAT ARTISTS.

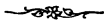
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JOHANN FRIEDRICH OVERBECK.

①
"The whole world without Art would be one great wilderness."



OVERBECK

BY J. BEAVINGTON ATKINSON

AUTHOR OF

'SCHOOLS OF MODERN ART IN GERMANY,' ETC.



NEW YORK

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TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
A. J. BERESFORD HOPE, ESQ.,
M.P., LL.D.,
THE KIND FRIEND OF ARTISTS,
THE FERVENT UPHOLDER OF CHRISTIAN ART,

This Life
OF
THE CHRISTIAN PAINTER J. FRIEDRICH OVERBECK
IS
RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED
BY
THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

I N offering to the public the first complete biography yet attempted of the painter Overbeck, I wish to give a few words in explanation. The task has been far from easy: the materials, though the reverse of scanty, are scattered: reminiscences of the artist and criticisms on his works lie as fragments dispersed over the current literature of Germany. My endeavour has been to fill in vacuities, to thread together a consistent and connected narrative, and thus, so far as I have been able, to present a true and lucid history.

My duty has been all the more anxious from the unusual complexity of the pictorial products falling under review. The scenes are laid amid the battle of the schools: the periods bring into prominence conflicts between classic, romantic, and naturalistic styles. The art of Overbeck was rooted in the olden times, yet in some degree it became quickened by contact with present life, and took also a personal aspect from the painter's inner self. The great pictures and the numberless drawings thus evolved over a space of more than half a century, and here described from my own knowledge, raise interesting and intricate questions on which the world

remains divided. My care has been to give a just estimate of these exceptional art manifestations.

Also enter into the art, through the life, conflicts of religious creeds, strifes between Protestantism and Catholicism, between Platonism, Mysticism, and Rationalism. In dealing with such delicate and serious topics I have avoided all controversy, and have ventured only on the simplest and briefest exposition. My effort has been to state the case fairly all round, to maintain an even balance, and, above all, to place the reader, whatever may chance to be his creed or art school, in a position to form a true judgment.

Likewise fairly to appreciate the artist, it is needful rightly to comprehend the man. And here, again, perplexities arise from unwonted combinations. The character is one of the noblest and purest, and yet it is beset with peculiar infirmities. The portrait offered in these pages is, I trust, true and individual, toned down into unity, and yet not left cold or colourless. Such negation would, indeed, do injustice to my own feelings. For among the cherished recollections of past days are my visits to Overbeck's studio, stretching over a period of twenty years: I learned to revere the master and to love his works, and I trust no word in this little volume may lessen the respect due to an honoured name.

J. B. A.

KENSINGTON,

May, 1882.

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Chart of the Overbeck Family.

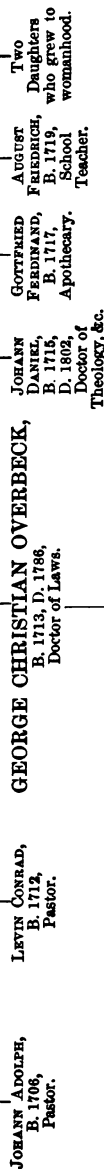
CASPAR OVERBECK,

Merchant, Religious Refugee.

CHRISTOPH OVERBECK, Pastor.

CASPAR NIKOLAS OVERBECK, D. 1752, Pastor.

Total number of Children 8 sons and 6 daughters: 2 sons and 4 daughters died in childhood.



JOHANN GEORGE,
D. 1819,
Pastor.

CHRISTIAN ADOLPH OVERBECK,
B. 1755, M. 1781, D. 1821,
Doctor of Laws, Syndic, Bürgermeister of Ldtbeck, &c.

4 sons and 2 daughters: one son died in childhood.

JOHANN FRIEDRICH OVERBECK,
B. in Ldtbeck 1799, M. 1819, D. in Rome 1869,
The Painter.

**FRÄU CHARLOTTE
LEITHOFF,**
deceased.

**FRÄU ELIZABETH
MEYER,**
deceased.

**FRÄU HARMG,
Ldtbeck,
living.**

ALFONS MARIA,
Son of the Painter,
B. 1822, D. 1840.
Painter: died
in childhood.

**FRÄU RATH
BRULEAUX,**
Berlin,
living.

**JOHANNES
GUSTAV,
Düsseldorf,
living.**

**JOHANNES
ARNOLD,
Düsseldorf,
living.**

**JOHANNES
Professor,
Doctor.
Archaeologist,
Leipzig, living.**

CHRISTIAN GERHARD,
B. 1784, D. 1846,
Judge, Ldtbeck.

**JOHANNES,
D. 1830,
Merchant.**

CHRISTIAN THEODORE,
B. 1818, D. 1840,
Doctor, Senator;
left no children.

**CONRAD,
Died at Riga,
Merchant.**

**JOHANNES
D. 1819,
Pastor.**

**FRÄU ELIZABETH
MEYER,
deceased.**

**FRÄU CHARLOTTE
LEITHOFF,
deceased.**

**FRÄU ELIZABETH
MEYER,
deceased.**



OVERBECK.

CHAPTER I.

LÜBECK—VIENNA.

JOHANN FRIEDRICH OVERBECK was born, as a tablet on his father's house records, in Lübeck on the 4th of July, 1789. Among his ancestors were Doctors of Law and Evangelical Pastors. His parents were good Protestants; his father was Burgomaster in the ancient city. Seldom has a life been so nicely preordained as that of the young religious painter. The light of his coming did not shine, as commonly supposed, out of surrounding darkness. A visit to his birth-place, expressly made for this memoir, soon showed me that Overbeck, from his youth upwards, had been tenderly cared for; that he received a classic education; that his mind was brought under moral and religious discipline; in short, that the rich harvest of later years had found its seed-time here within the family home in Lübeck.

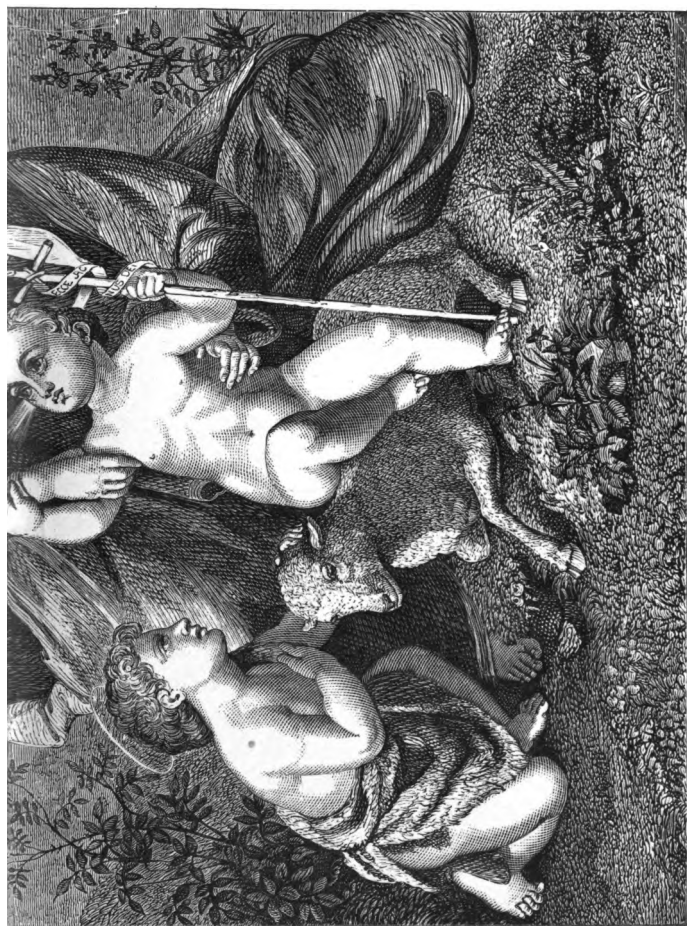
The old house in which Overbeck was born has unfortunately, within the last few years, been modernised, but the original medallion relief of the painter's head, life-size,

B

is built into the new façade, and the former structure can be accurately ascertained as well from the designs of the adjoining tenements as from the living testimony of the neighbours.* The Overbeck mansion stood in the König Strasse, a principal thoroughfare in the heart of an old city which may not inaptly be designated the Nuremberg of Northern Germany. It is not difficult here on the spot to picture the life of the painter while yet in his teens. The historic town of Lübeck had enjoyed a signal political, commercial and artistic epoch. As the head of the Hanseatic League, it rose to unexampled prosperity. Deputies from eighty confederate municipalities assembled in the audience-chamber of the Rathhaus; fortifications, walls and gateways were reared for defence, and merchant princes made their opulence and love of ostentation conspicuous in dwellings of imposing and picturesque design; thus pointed gables, high-pitched overhanging roofs, stamp with mediæval character the present streets. Then, too, were founded rich ecclesiastical establishments; then was built the cathedral, containing among other treasures matchless brasses, a unique rood-loft, and a double triptych, the masterpiece of Memling. This sacred work made a deep impression on young Overbeck, and is known to have given a direction to his art. About the same period was also reared the Marien Kirche, enriched with bronze sacrament-house, old German triptychs and fine painted glass. This is the church in which the painter's father,

* The Overbeck house, when I sought it out in 1880, was rebuilt and retenanted; the ground floor happens to be now occupied by a bookseller and fancy stationer, who sustains intact the Protestant character of the establishment. In vain I enquired for engravings from Overbeck; the nearest approach to religious art was a portrait of Luther in chromo-lithography!





THE HOLY FAMILY.

as Burgomaster, had a distinguished stall, elaborately carved; and now, on visiting the spot, I find appropriately among the treasures two chefs-d'œuvre which the son affectionately wrought for the city of his birth. These churches are Protestant, but fortunately the worst sign of the Reformation is whitewash, and so the relics of the past are reverently conserved, and here in Lübeck, as in Nuremberg, the Madonna still holds her honoured niche, and the saints yet shine from out the painted window, even as in after-years the selfsame characters appeared on the canvases of Overbeck. Amid associations thus sacred, encircled by a family addicted to learning and piety, to poetry and art, was the tranquil spirit of the young painter led into meditative paths; and as I took my evening walk at the setting of the sun by the side of the wooded river, under shadow of the old gateways and churches, it was not very hard to realize how the love of nature and of art grew up in the mind of the young student, and how this city of the past proved a fitting prelude to a noble life-work which set as its goal the revival of what was best and most beautiful in the olden times.

The family of Overbeck had been for generations pre-eminent for learning and piety, and biographers have scarcely sufficiently taken into account either the Classic or the Christian inheritance of the painter. Religious teaching and living came by long lineal descent (see Family Chart on page xvi.): the great, great, great grandfather, Caspar Overbeck, was a religious refugee; the next in succession, Christoph, was a Protestant pastor; and to the same sacred calling belonged his son, Caspar Nikolas, who lived into the middle of the last century. After comes the grandfather, George Christian, Doctor of Laws;

and among collaterals signally shines the great-uncle, Johann Daniel Overbeck (died 1802, aged 88);* this memorable man was Doctor of Theology, Rector of the Lübeck Gymnasium, and a voluminous writer; he published thirty or more treatises; among the number are 'The Spirit of Religion,' 'Grounds of Agreement in Religion through the Reason and the Understanding;' also discourses on St. Peter, St. Paul, and Luther. Facility of pen runs through the family. Two other great-uncles, Johann Adolph and Levin Conrad Overbeck, brothers of the Doctor of Theology, were Pastors: furthermore must not be forgotten the uncle, Johann George (brother of the Burgomaster), who lived till 1819, and is described as a faithful untiring pastor to an evangelical congregation, who offered his life a willing sacrifice. "Duty" might be the watchword of all who bear the name of Overbeck. Lastly, and not least, appears the pious, learned, and æsthetic father, Christian Adolph. Though not in holy orders, he concerned himself variously with religion in the wide and vital sense of the word, holding it a divine presence, the rule of life, and the inspirer of all noble work. I should judge he was not dogmatic in creed, nor rigid in ceremonial. He was philosophic, but had too much heart to be a rationalist; too much imagination for an anti-supernaturalist. He was a mystic pietist; religion blending with poetry coloured his whole mind; revelation, nature, and art, were for him one and indivisible. And this I believe to have been the mental state of the son while

* See 'Leben Herrn Johann Daniel Overbeck, weiland Doctors der Theologie und Rectors des Lübeckischen Gymnasiums, von einem nahen Verwandten, und vormaligen Schüler des Verewigten.' Lübeck, 1803.

yet under the parental roof. The sequel will show a change; the incertitude of speculation could not be sustained, and so anchorage was sought within an "Infallible Church." Yet for the right reading of a character curiously subtle and complex, it is needful to realise the fact that the seeds sown in the homestead were never uprooted, that it was, indeed, the old stock which sustained the new grafting, and that, to the last, a poetic mysticism dwelt in the chambers of the artist's mind. And as was the tree so were the fruits; sprung from a family of preachers, the painter became an evangelist in his art.

The father, Dr. Christian Adolph Overbeck, as the formative type of the son, merits a further word.* If not quite a genius, he was the model of a scholar and a gentleman; besides being Burgomaster in the city of his birth, he was Doctor of Laws, Syndic of the Cathedral Chapter, and served in important political missions to Paris and St. Petersburg. He is described "*Musis Amicus*"; † and not only the friend of poesy, he was a poet himself, and by virtue of the duality habitual to his mind dedicated his pen with singular impartiality to Christ and Apollo; one volume of verses being entitled '*Anacreon and Sappho*,' another, containing a poem, on '*The Love of God*.' These products rise somewhat above the level of respectable

* See '*Zur Erinnerung an Christian Adolph Overbeck, beider Rechte Doctor und Bürgermeister zu Lübeck*.' Lübeck, 1830.

† I have seen in the Public Library, Lübeck, the engraved portrait inscribed with the above words; the head bears a striking resemblance to the well-known features of the son: the profile shows a fine intellectual type, the forehead is ample and overhanging, the coronal region full, the eye searching and earnest, the upper lip long, the mouth large and firmly set. The last was not the most beautiful feature in the painter's remarkable face.

mediocrity, yet they have not escaped the stigma of platitudes. Goethe, however, did not disdain to make respectful mention of the poet. The painter inherited in some small degree the paternal gift; he accompanied with verses the engraved and published drawings, *Jesus as a Child in the House at Nazareth*. By the father I have also before me a "new edition," published 1831, of a collection entitled 'Frizchens Lieder,'* so called because penned for the benefit of the youthful Frederick. The preface makes mention of "my little Frizchen" thus:—"It were better had he been an angel, but he is just a human child:" then, facetiously, it is added, "he is less ideal than saucy and conceited." Those who like myself knew only the solemnity of the painter in advanced years have a difficulty in supposing in the child such traits compatible. These songs of the domestic affections were set to music; the father, as a dilettante complete, cultivated all the harmonies whether of thought, form, or sound; the home was musical.

The family life composes into a placid, homelike picture. The parents, though well to do, were far from affluent. The stipends of the busy Burgomaster and Syndic were small, and he remained comparatively poor. At the age of twenty-six he married a young widow with money and one daughter, and domestic cares necessarily thickened with the birth of six additional children, two daughters and four sons, of whom Frederick was the youngest. The mother, we are told, was beloved and honoured, and in addition to ordinary domestic duties, diligently assisted her children in the preparation of their school lessons; moreover it is expressly stated that her fortune contributed

* 'Frizchens Lieder, herausgegeben von Christian Adolph Overbeck : neue Ausgabe.' Hamburg, Verlag von August Campe, 1831.

largely to the household expenses. The would-be artist could not be considered unfortunate in his worldly condition; he entered on life removed equally from the extremes of riches or poverty; his parents were sufficiently well off to make it possible for him to gratify his tastes in the choice of a profession, while he was always under such pressure as to render it imperative that he should put out his full powers. His education within the limits of a provincial town was liberal; the father kept himself and his household quiet, student-like, and sequestered from the dissipation of society, and so all the better could be cultivated the budding faculties of his offspring. When the children were sufficiently advanced he joined with other parents in engaging a qualified tutor, and so formed a special class or superior school. With affection was watched the inclination towards art of the youngest son, and anxiety lessened as the faculty strongly declared itself, for above all was dreaded "mediocrity as the deadly sin of artists." The father held that for success in art as a profession three conditions were essential; classic training, nobility of mind, and technical skill. And so in each day the foremost place was assigned to classic studies. As to the formation of character, religion stood as the corner-stone, and the maxim for the daily life was "love in a pure mind." This axiom sounds to me as the key-note to the painter's lifelong art—an art loving in spirit and kept unspotted from the world. But the father and son differed in this—that the one was eclectic, the other exclusive. The father, with the wide toleration of a poet-philosopher, believed in the possibility of harmoniously combining styles, Classic, Romantic, and Christian. His views may be judged from the following:

The Father's Monition to study the Classics.

With joy I see you constant in the study of the ancients. To the Greeks and old Romans was it given to stand as the everlasting lawgivers of the beautiful. Well for you that you read the classics: above all, acquaint yourself with the glorious forerunner, Homer, of whom almost every line is a picture. Homer in the right chamber of the heart, and the Bible in the left—or *vice-versâ*—in this way, it seems to me, you cannot go far astray.

Creed for a Purist Painter.

The artist's and poet's mind should be as a spotless mirror: his heart must be pure and pious, at one with God and all mankind. The path to the holy Temple of Art lies apart from the world, and the painter will go on his way all the more unassailed if he stand aloof from the temptations of the senses. And if the artist's mind be a temple, then should find place therein only the figures of saints and the semblances of holy things; and even in profane representations a heavenly spirit should reign. The mind is raised by the contemplation of the master-works of genius, thus art reaches the highest summit.

It is not to be supposed that the youth while in Lübeck reached the father's ideal; but within a stone's throw of the house lay a Gymnasium, including a Drawing School of which the great uncle, Dr. Johann Daniel Overbeck, had been head master. Here, on the spot, I am told the nephew received from a certain Professor Federau instruction in art, and I have before me a drawing, the earliest that has come to my knowledge, which proves that the pupil was at least painstaking. The subject, in accordance

with the father's precept, is Homeric, the well-known meeting of Ulysses and Telemachus.* After the prevailing manner of the period, the style is classic, according to the French school of David, and a Greek portico appropriately finds a place in the back-ground. Young Overbeck discovered in the sequel how much he had to learn and to unlearn; he closed Homer to open his Bible.

The time came for a change in the scene of action, the art resources of a small provincial town were exhausted, and the necessity arose for thorough academic training elsewhere. The choice in those days was not extended, and after due consideration the election fell in favour of Vienna. Accordingly, in March, 1806, at the age of seventeen, young Overbeck left Lübeck. The home-parting was tender, and might have been heart-rending could the future have been read. Never were son and parents to meet again. Frederick in sundry years, when full of honours, visited Germany, but he seemed to shrink from a return to the scenes of his youth; change in religion may have made contact painful. Yet we are told that closest communication was kept up by constant correspondence; that the father affectionately watched his son's illustrious

* This juvenile exercise, probably only a copy, was given by young Overbeck to his master, and is now in the Town Library; it is washed in with Indian ink, measures two feet by one foot nine inches, and is signed and dated "F. Overbeck, 1805-21 April." The Gymnasium, like the House, has recently been rebuilt, but the continuity of learning remains unbroken—boys flock to the school as in the painter's youth. The adjoining Town Library also contains the original cartoon, drawn in Rome, for one of the frescoes illustrative of Tasso in the Villa Massimo, length about ten feet; likewise the cartoon of the Vision of St. Francis, painted in fresco in Sta. Maria degli Angeli, near Assisi; the cartoon is about twenty feet long, the figures are life-size.

career and read with lively satisfaction all announcements in the public journals. The mother died in 1820, the father a year after : for forty years they had been lovingly united. I have visited the retired "God's-acre," beyond the gates, removed from the noisy traffic of the town, and not without difficulty discovered the grave of father and mother. So dense was the overgrowth of years, that not a letter on the massive stone could be seen ; but the old man of the place, tearing away the thick mantle of ivy, revealed the words, "Here rest in God Elizabeth Overbeck, and Christian Adolph Overbeck, Burgomaster."

On reaching Vienna, the super-sensuous painter did not find a bed of roses : his tastes were fastidious, his habits exclusive, his aspirations impracticable. Of course his art remained as yet unremunerative ; thus his means were scanty, and the friends he might have hoped to make turned out enemies. And it cannot be denied that the state of things in Vienna was enough to discourage and disgust an earnest, truth-seeking student. The Academy into which the Christian artist entered was under the direction of Friedrich Füger, a painter of the French type, not without renown, but given over to the service of Jupiter, Prometheus, and Venus, and when he chanced to turn to sacred subjects, such as *The Death of Abel* and *The Reading Magdalen*, affectation and empty pretence were his resource. I have seldom seen works more contemptible. Overbeck was in despair, and wrote to a friend that he had fallen among a vulgar set, that every better feeling, every noble thought, was suppressed within the Academy, and that, losing all faith in humanity and in art, he turned inwardly on himself. This transcendental strain, I cannot but think, came in some measure from the conceit incident

to youth; self-complaisancy was certainly a habit of mind which the painter persistently cultivated as a virtue.

Four years' work within an organised academy could not be otherwise than a gain to a tyro who had everything to learn. Director Füger was at least thoroughly trained; talent and industry had early won him the distinction of pensioner to Rome, and he subsequently executed important frescoes in Naples, which obtain honourable mention in the history of the times. His school might be bad, but still it was a school; and the fact cannot be controverted that Overbeck issued from it an artist. He learnt what his father had laid down as essential to success, drawing, composition, technique, and his advance was such, that while in Vienna he commenced, and in part painted, *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*, a prized possession to this day in the Marien Kirche, Lübeck. Moreover, I am inclined to think that under Füger he was grounded in the art of wall-painting, not only as a manipulative method, but as a system of composition and decoration; otherwise it is hard to understand how, shortly after arriving in Rome, he knew more about fresco than the Italians themselves. Overbeck and his master, however, became all the more irreconcilable because the discords lay less in the letter than in the spirit.

In order to realise Overbeck's artistic and mental difficulties here in Vienna, and afterwards in Rome, it may be well in fewest words to indicate the perplexed state of things in Germany generally—a wide theme on which volumes have been written. We have to consider that Europe had suffered under the throes of the great French Revolution, and that then followed the galling despotism of Napoleon. Art and literature lay frozen and paralysed,

and Overbeck in Lübeck and Vienna, like Cornelius in Düsseldorf, found in tyrannous sway the pseudo-classic school of the French David, cold as marble, rigid as petrification, spasmodic as a galvanised muscle. But the Germans, especially the more intellectual sort, smarting under the yoke, were all the while gathering strength to reclaim nationality as their birthright. The reaction came through the romantic movement, otherwise the revival of the poetry and the art of the Middle Ages. Overbeck fell under the influence: in his Lübeck home he read Tieck's 'Phantasies on Art,' and thirsted for the regeneration drawing near. In Rome the spell heightened; thinkers such as Frederick Schlegel brought over proselytes, and the painter's early frescoes from Tasso's 'Jerusalem Delivered,' came as the specific products of the new era. But the School of Romance wore two aspects; the one, Poetic and Chivalrous; the other expressly Christian; and Overbeck was not content to exchange Homer and Virgil for Dante and Tasso, he turned from the age of Pericles and Augustus to the nativity of Christ. And it seemed to him that the pure spring of Christian Art had, not only in Vienna but throughout Europe, been for long diverted and corrupted, and so he sought out afresh the living source, and casting on one side his contemporaries, took for his guides the pre-Raphaelite masters. Such is the relation in which he stands to the Romantic movement.

But the election made in favour of an art born of Christianity proved for Overbeck the severer conflict, because Germany, in the generation scarcely passed away, had experienced a studious classic revival under the critic Winckelmann and the painters Mengs and Carstens. Goethe, too, a tyrant in power, had thrown his weight into the

classic scale, and, much to the chagrin of the young painter, declared that the highest Christian Art was but the perfecting of humanity. Moreover, classicism had been brought within the painter's home by a five years' sojourn in Lübeck of Carstens, the Flaxman of Germany. The father befriended the poor artist, and being well-read in Greek and Roman authors, supplied him, among other needs, with ideas for his classic compositions. I deem these facts should be duly considered; it is wholly false to ignore the presence of a classic element in the Christian Art of Overbeck; and just as the purest religious painters of Italy borrowed from the Pagans, so the great Christian Artist of our times culled from the antique all he could assimilate. It is clear to me, judging from the internal evidence of his works, that as a student Overbeck went through the usual course of drawing from the plaster cast. Many are the passages in his compositions which might be quoted in point, particularly Biblical incidents, such as the *Expulsion from Paradise*, wherein appear undraped figures. Here are seen to advantage the generic form, the typical beauty, the harmony of line, the symmetry, which distinguish the Classic from the Gothic. Furthermore, Overbeck from first to last eschewed the dress actually worn in the Holy Land, and deliberately draped Christ and the Apostles as Greek sages and Roman senators. I believe in so doing he was on the whole wise, his motive being to remove his characters from the sphere of common life; even for him, the most single-minded of men, art was a compromise: but while borrowing thus largely both in figure and costume from the Classic, it were vain to contend that his creations had an exclusively Christian origin. I may add that I do not think the controversy lies so much between

religions as between historic Schools of Art. Overbeck was so much the artist that, like Raphael, he made beauty wherever extant his own, only caring that whatever was taken from the Pagan should be baptized with the Christian spirit. Thus much indeed is confessed in his explanatory text to his master-work the *Triumph of Religion in the Arts*. Therefore in quoting his own words the subject may fairly be allowed to drop: he writes: "Although heathenism, as such, should be looked upon by the Christian painter with decided disdain, yet the arts as well as the literature of the ancients may be turned to advantage, as the children of Israel employed the gold and silver vessels which they brought with them out of Egypt in the service of the true God in His Temple, after melting them down and consecrating them anew."

The much abused Director Fûger was the champion, as we have seen, of hybrid classicism, hence the hostility between master and pupil. The precise attitude assumed by the contending parties it is not very easy to define; but that there were faults on both sides may easily be conceded; that each was in extreme is also evident, and that Overbeck was the last man to yield an inch or to meet half way is equally certain. The fatal conflict broke out in differences as to the modes of study: of the Academy we should now say that it was conventional, wedded to false methods, in short, that it had wholly lost the right road in the devious paths of decadence. The young innovators, not choosing to conform, assumed a defiant position analogous to, though not identical with, that taken half a century later by our English pre-Raphaelite brethren. The study of the early masters in the royal collection they preferred to the routine of the Academy; thus Dürer

and Perugino were held up in challenge to Correggio and Rubens, the idols of the day. Then the discord was equally violent as to the right mode of studying nature. The charge made against the German pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was that they dealt with the life-model crudely and inartistically; on the contrary, Overbeck and his adherents declared that they sought for nothing else than truth, only they held that nature should not be studied superficially, but with the end of deciphering her hidden meanings. The human body they looked on as a temple, the face they read as the mirror of the mind. All this, and much more besides, though then a novelty, is now an old story; the doctrine that the bodily form is moulded on the spiritual being, the speculations concerning the relations between the "objective" and the "subjective," the outward and the inward, the correspondence between the world of sense and the world of thought, have one and all taken definite place in the history of mental philosophy. We have here fully to realise that Overbeck had breathed the atmosphere of mystic spiritualism in Lübeck; hence his entrance into "spiritual art," hence his "soul pictures." His mind being thus sublimated, he looked down upon the Viennese Academicians as common and unclean; a rupture naturally ensued, and he and his companions being in the minority, were with a strong hand, and with little ceremony, expelled from the classes. The blow for the moment seemed overwhelming, yet it brought salvation. Had Overbeck remained chained to the Academy, art through him would not have seen a new birth. His course became clear: he quitted Vienna for Rome, the city of his desire.

In the fourth and last year of the painter's apprentice-

ship in the Austrian capital, was begun a really arduous composition, *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*.* The picture is of the utmost import as affording the only evidence of the artist's attainments in Vienna. In the first place to be remarked is the striking fact that not a vestige remains of the French school of David, or of the showy masters of the Italian decadence; the work, indeed, might have been designed as a protest against the Viennese Academy, and as a justification of the painter's revolt. The style adopted is conjointly that of the Italian pre-Raphaelite and of the early German and Flemish masters. The background is built up into a high horizon giving support to the foreground figures; the colours are deep and lustrous, and so far contrast favourably with the weaker and cruder tones unfortunately adopted at a later period. The costume is a deliberate compromise between the classic and the naturalistic. Nowhere does the artist venture, as Horace Vernet, on the Bedouin dress. Christ is clothed in a flowing robe, while the Apostles, as in the compositions of Raphael, belong less to the Holy Land than to the Roman Forum. This treatment of draperies was adhered to through all

* This picture, on canvas, is nearly eight feet long by six feet high, the figures are about three feet. The 'Lübeckische Blätter' states that "Overbeck began the work in Vienna in 1809, in the fourth year of his art study, and there completed the background and the figures in the middle plane, and that it was taken by him to Rome in 1810." In the course of time the foreground figures were introduced, but not till 1824 did the picture reach completion. It bears the signature and date "J. F. Overbeck, 1824." Thus fifteen years elapsed between the first touch and the last, and some ten further years passed before the canvas came to the artist's native city. I carefully examined the painting in the Marien Kirche in October, 1880, and found it in perfect preservation, the colours unchanged, the surface untouched by time or restoration. The picture differs from the illustration to these pages.

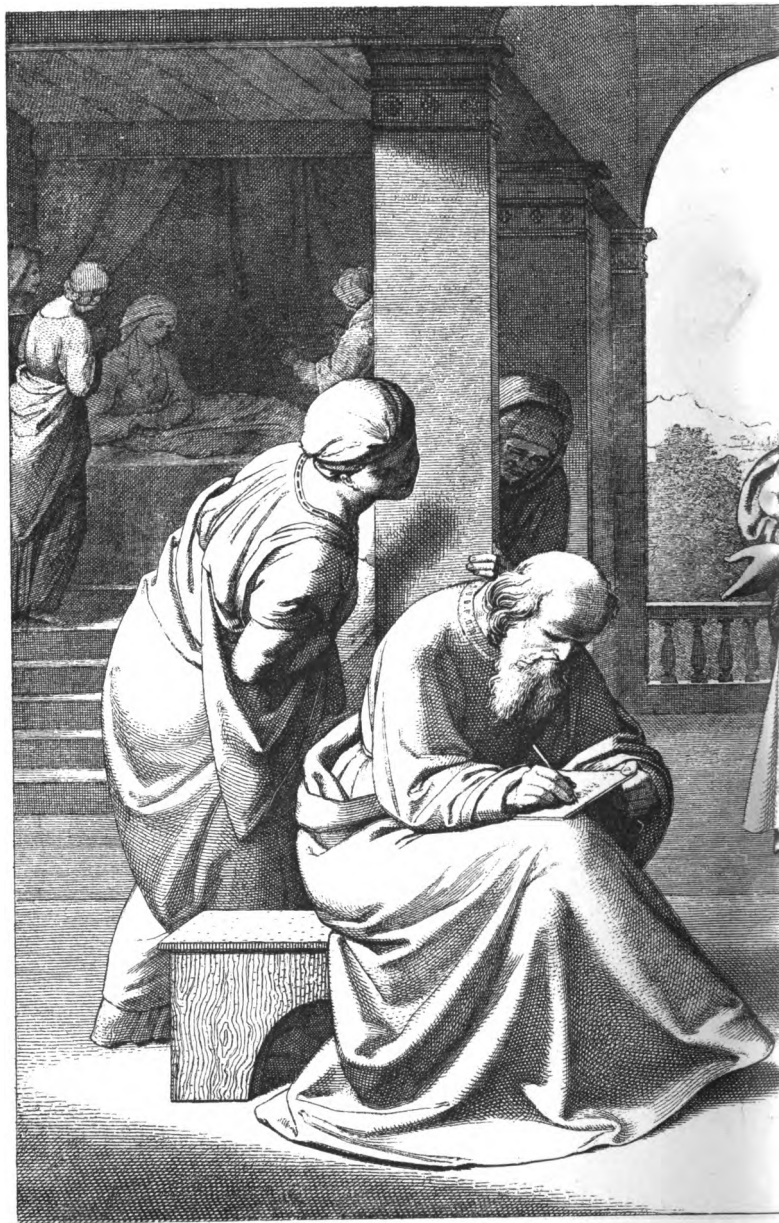
subsequent works, the only change being further generalisation and a wider departure from naturalism. In fact it is curious to observe in this early work how much nature enters; figures and incidents come direct from life, as witness portraits of contemporaries, groups of little children, young mothers and aged women. Such passages are happily destitute of what the Viennese academicians called "style;" they have more of the old German angularity than of "the Grecian bend." Yet always with Overbeck Beauty is present, only not thrust in, as by the academicians of the period, in violation of Truth and Goodness. Also very noteworthy is the impress of thought in the heads, hands, and attitudes; the painter, as we have seen, came of a family of thinkers, and the purport of his art was to give expression to mind. Here again he took as his teachers the early masters, so that these figures, though more or less studied from nature, might seem to have walked out from an old panel picture, yet they are more than complications, they are impressed with the painter's own individuality. Altogether the work marks not only a starting-point in Overbeck's life, but a new era in the art of the nineteenth century.

The composition by lapse of time gains biographic and historic value through the introduction, in accordance with the practice of the old masters, of contemporary portraits. The painter has placed among the spectators his father, in character of Burgomaster, also close by, his mother, a remarkably shrewd old lady. His wife, memorable as a beauty, is grouped with the three Marys, and by her side sports the painter's much-loved son, a boy, palm-branch in hand, rejoicing with the multitude. Nor are the pilgrim painters in Rome forgotten: Overbeck and his

brother artists, Cornelius and others, appear at respectful distance, gazing on Christ riding into Jerusalem.

Overbeck, before quitting Vienna, pretty much determined his vocation: he resolved to dedicate his life to Christian Art. On the point of departure, in writing to a friend in Lübeck, he takes a retrospective view, and also points to the future. He recalls evening walks under the shade of trees with congenial companions; he remembers earnest conversations on poetry, painting, and other manifestations of the beautiful, yet still something remained wanting. True art, he writes, he had sought in vain: "Oh, I was so full of it, my whole fancy was possessed by Madonnas and Christs; I bore these impressions about with me, I cherished them, but nowhere could I find response." In Vienna, as we have seen, the desire of his soul remained unsatisfied. His conflicts were painful, but once for all he declares, "I will abide by the Bible; I elect it as my standing-point." A few friends were like-minded, and one especially, who had come from Italy, encouraged a pilgrimage to the land of Christian Art. Accordingly, Overbeck packed up his small worldly possessions, of which the canvas of *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem* was the most considerable, and at length he reached Rome as a haven of rest.









CHAPTER II.

ROME—THE GERMAN BROTHERHOOD.

THE biographies of artists, proverbially picturesque, present few scenes more pleasant to look on than the early years in Rome of the Brotherhood of German Painters, of whom Overbeck and his friend Cornelius were the leaders. Exiles in some sort from their native land, they entered Italy as pilgrims, and were not far from suffering as martyrs. They were devout, hard-working, and withal poor. They had been drawn from distant cities to Rome as a common focus, and there they severed themselves from ignoble present times, and abiding quietly amid ancient monuments and sacred shrines, sought to make the days of old live anew. So congenial did Rome prove to Overbeck, that he could hardly be induced to sever himself from the city or its neighbourhood over a space of more than fifty years. The task he assigned to himself was arduous: how he went to work and accomplished his mission I shall try to show.

Overbeck, in company with his brother artists, Pforr, Vogel and Hottinger, having in Vienna cast off all fetters, entered Rome as freemen in 1810. A year later Cornelius,

as a young Hercules, came upon the scene; he had fought his way from Düsseldorf; like Overbeck, he had found the Academy a burden and a snare, and he betook himself to Italy for deliverance. Then began that closest friendship between the two painters which, lasting for more than half a century, was severed only by death. Cornelius, writing to his friend Mosler, describes the German Brotherhood in Rome, and adds: "Overbeck from Lübeck is the one who by the gentleness and nobility of his soul draws all around him; he inspires them to everything true and beautiful. May be he is the greatest artist now living: you would be astonished if you could see him at his work. Yet he is the most humble and retiring of men." If Overbeck were as a lamb, surely Cornelius was a lion, each indeed supplied what was lacking in the other. Cornelius in after years said to Rudolf Lehmann, "I am the man, he is the woman." And it may strike the mind as a singular coincidence, or rather as a benignant disposition of Providence, that at sundry turning-points in the world's history, two men the opposites the one of the other have been conjoined, as if for the better accomplishment of the work to be done. We may recall, in art, Raphael and Michelangelo; in religion, St. John and St. Peter, Melanchthon and Luther; and in philosophy, Plato and Aristotle. At the risk of pushing the analogy too far, it may be added that Cornelius was positive as Aristotle, impetuous as St. Peter and Luther, defiant as Michelangelo; while in contrast, Overbeck shared with Plato idealism, with St. John love, with Melanchthon gentleness, and with Raphael grace.

The German colony of pre-Raphaelite painters in Rome grew, and in after years came accessions almost un-

intermittingly.* Within the first twelve months were gathered together, as we have seen, Overbeck, Cornelius, Pforr, Vogel and Hottinger. Soon followed the brothers Wilhelm and Rudolf Schadow : to these must be added Koch, Wintergerst, Sutter, Mosler, Veit, Schnorr, Eggers, Platner, and others. Later came Joseph Führich, who literally worshipped the ground on which Overbeck stood. Edward Steinle, of a younger generation, was also a bosom friend of the painter. Later still arrived young zealots from Düsseldorf, where Schadow had established the renowned school of religious art. The best known of these disciples are Ernst Deger, Franz Ittenbach, and the brothers Andreas and Carl Müller. After sitting at the feet of Overbeck in Rome, it was their privilege to paint the chapel at Remagen on the Rhine : these frescoes are accepted as among the most beauteous manifestations of the master's teachings. This brief epitome anticipates the story of years. In the course of a long life it was the good fortune of Overbeck to witness the growth into a large tree of the grain of mustard-seed he had cast into the earth.

The Brethren found congenial habitation in the old Franciscan convent of Sant' Isidoro on the Pincian Hill. The picturesque monks having been turned out by Napoleon, the German colony became tenants at a yearly rental, and held in quietude the dormitories, also larger rooms which served as studios, until the fall of the First Empire, when the monastery once more reverted to the Mendicant Friars, by whom it is still occupied. A few years since, the Superior of the Order politely showed the present

* See among other authorities: 'Die Deutsche Kunst in unserem Jahrhundert, von Dr. Hagen,' vol. ix. Berlin, 1857.

writer over the ecclesiastical establishment, now, as formerly, devoted to charitable works. Time has brought little change in the cells, the refectory, or in the large hall used for religious teaching. Other rooms, great and small, are ranged round a cloister enclosing a garden still fragrant with orange-blossoms as in the days of Overbeck and Cornelius. Here, amid sacred associations and venerable monuments, did these devoted students build up the new art, and when the day's work was ended, they mounted at eventide the lofty Belvedere, commanding a panorama of which, even in Rome, are few equals. From neighbouring campanili, vesper bells sound a chorus in the bright Italian sky, and beneath the eye stretches, as a prairie of the old world, the wide Campagna, spanned by broken viaducts and bounded by the blue Alban hills. Through the panorama winds the golden Tiber, guarded by the Castle of St. Angelo and St. Peter's, and around and below lie Monte Mario, the pine-clad Pincian, the Villa Medici, and the ilex groves of the Ludovisi. The scene was inspiring, yet not without shadow of melancholy; the Capitol had fallen into the hands of the stranger, but the spirit of Dante fired the dauntless young men; they turned from the present to the past, "imagination restored the empire that had been lost," and though "calamity afflicted the country, they believed that God had not forsaken the people."

Overbeck is known to have been deeply penetrated by the beauties of the Italian sky and landscape. After sufferance of the rigours of northern winters, mind and body expanded under the sun of the genial south. In spring-time came days serene as his own spirit, giving to nature the re-birth he sought for art; the clear horizon

carried thought to a world beyond ; and in the deep blue above floated such clouds as had served the old pre-Raphaelites with the thrones and footstools of saints and angels. Overbeck did not, as the masters of the decadence, shroud his compositions in backgrounds of impenetrable darkness, but flooded the canvas with the light of the Italian heavens, and like the early painters, placed holy people in the midst of such beauties of nature as tranquillise and elevate the mind. And his sympathetic eye was not only open to scenes which served as distances, he watched in the gardens of the Roman villas the springing flowers, and made careful studies of mossy, jewelled foregrounds which served as carpeting for the feet of his Madonnas. Having turned his back on the Fatherland, his pictures bear no memories of black forests or frowning Harzburg mountains, and he became so thoroughly Italianised that he seated Holy Families on the borders of the Thrasymene Lake, and placed saints within sight of Mount Soracte ! Like all true artists, he painted what he saw ; as his predecessors, he gathered in daily walks the accessories he needed. Fra Angelico had painted at Fiesole, Francia at Bologna, Perugino at Perugia, Pinturicchio at Spello and Siena, and each in turn, like Overbeck, made the surrounding scenery serve as accompaniments to figure compositions. Nature was to all these painters a great teacher ; her presences were healing powers, and they left out all the storms and discords, and like our poet Wordsworth, brought her forms and aspects into harmony with tranquil living. Yet the Brethren from their monastic abode in Sant' Isidoro looked upon the outer world with sympathies as diverse as their individual characters. When Cornelius took his walks abroad, he crossed the Tiber to visit the

Last Judgment of Michelangelo. Overbeck's steps lay in an opposite direction; he passed by the church of Sta. Maria Maggiore, looked in for the sake of the old mosaics, and then wended his solitary way to Sta. Croce in Gerusalemme, to pay his devotions before the frescoes commemorative of the discovery by St. Helena of the true Cross. Here, in lovely surroundings, nature blended in unison with art, he looked on the blue hills and the calm sky, and thanked God Italy was his home.

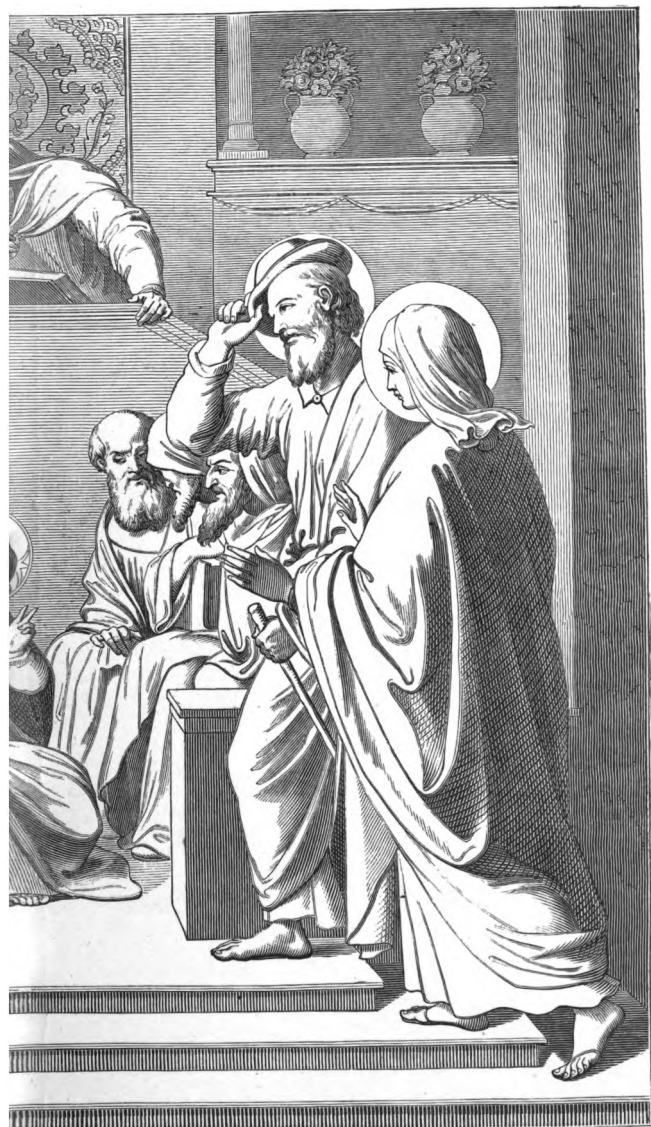
The mode of living adopted within the cells and refectory of Sant' Isidoro naturally savoured of the monastic: it combined appropriately society with solitude. The habit of the Brethren was to take meals together at a common table, and to work separately each in his private painting-room. The refectory served as a common hall for study and for drawing from the model. The rule obtained in the establishment that the provisioning and housekeeping should be taken in rotation by each, one week at a time, and it is said that Overbeck had so far a sense of creature comforts that he complained that one of the Brothers was accustomed to put too much water into the broth! On Sundays the work relaxed or ceased wholly, and the wholesome practice prevailed of bringing together the products of the week for criticism with the end to mutual improvement: many grave observations and lively pleasantries passed from one to the other, Overbeck usually in his modest way acting the part of mentor. "No one," writes Schadow, "who saw or heard him speak, could question his purity of motive, his deep insight and abounding knowledge: he is a treasury of art and poetry and a saintly man." Overbeck had stoutly defended the adopted course of study which others condemned. "What," he asked,



CHRIST IN

(From a Drawing in the

Digitized by Google



THE TEMPLE.

Irish Collection, at Basle.)

"has been our crime? It is in great measure that we have striven after a severe outline, in opposition to the loose, cloudy, washed-out manner of the day. Is not this an endeavour after truth?" But such studies, while filling portfolios, brought no grist to the mill. And the historian Niebuhr, an anxious friend, confesses that these devoted men "were hard put to it for their daily bread," yet never has a confraternity of artists more nearly approached an ideal. No vow was actually taken, the bond was simply voluntary; thus Overbeck expressly states, "with the greatest concord among us as to the fundamental principles of art, each goes on his own way."

The attitude assumed almost of necessity provoked opposition, even ridicule. The assumption was made of superiority, the tone grew even assailable; Correggio, Guido, Guercino, and Domenichino, with all post-Raphaelites, were denounced, and not only was it declared, "We are right," but it was added, "You are wrong." The Brethren personally laid themselves open to attack; they were not free from the affectations of youth, they made themselves conspicuous by long hair and strange costume, and through their exclusiveness and sanctity won as their nickname the epithet of "Nazarites." Other designations were less characteristic; simply descriptive are such terms as "pre-Raphaelites," "the new-old School," "the German-Roman artists," "the Church-Romantic painters," "the German patriotic and religious painters." But all trivial imputations weigh lightly when set in the balance against solid work and holy living. The earnest devotees in the long run silenced evil tongues and won respect and a good name. Niebuhr, ambassador and historian, by no means a blind apologist, describing the art society of the day,

writes : "The painters in Rome are divided by a broad line of demarcation into two parties—the one consisting of our friends and their adherents, the other of the united phalanx of those who are of the world, a set who intrigue and lie and backbite ; they intend there shall not be light, come what will. The former are exemplary in their lives ; the latter display the old licentiousness which characterised the German artists in Rome thirty years ago. Happily, at the present moment, the more talented of the newcomers are ranged on the side of our friends. It is a hopeful sign that some foreigners, and even Italians, are beginning to pay attention to their works." Overbeck and his more immediate associates were indeed, in the best sense of the term, "purists" and "pietists," and held vitally to the maxim that they who would know of a doctrine must live out the doctrine. On no other conditions was it possible to accomplish their mission—the regeneration of art. The schools around them had fallen in great measure through lack of sincerity and truth ; they in contrast believed as our English Bishop Butler taught, that conscience is the ruling faculty in the human mind.

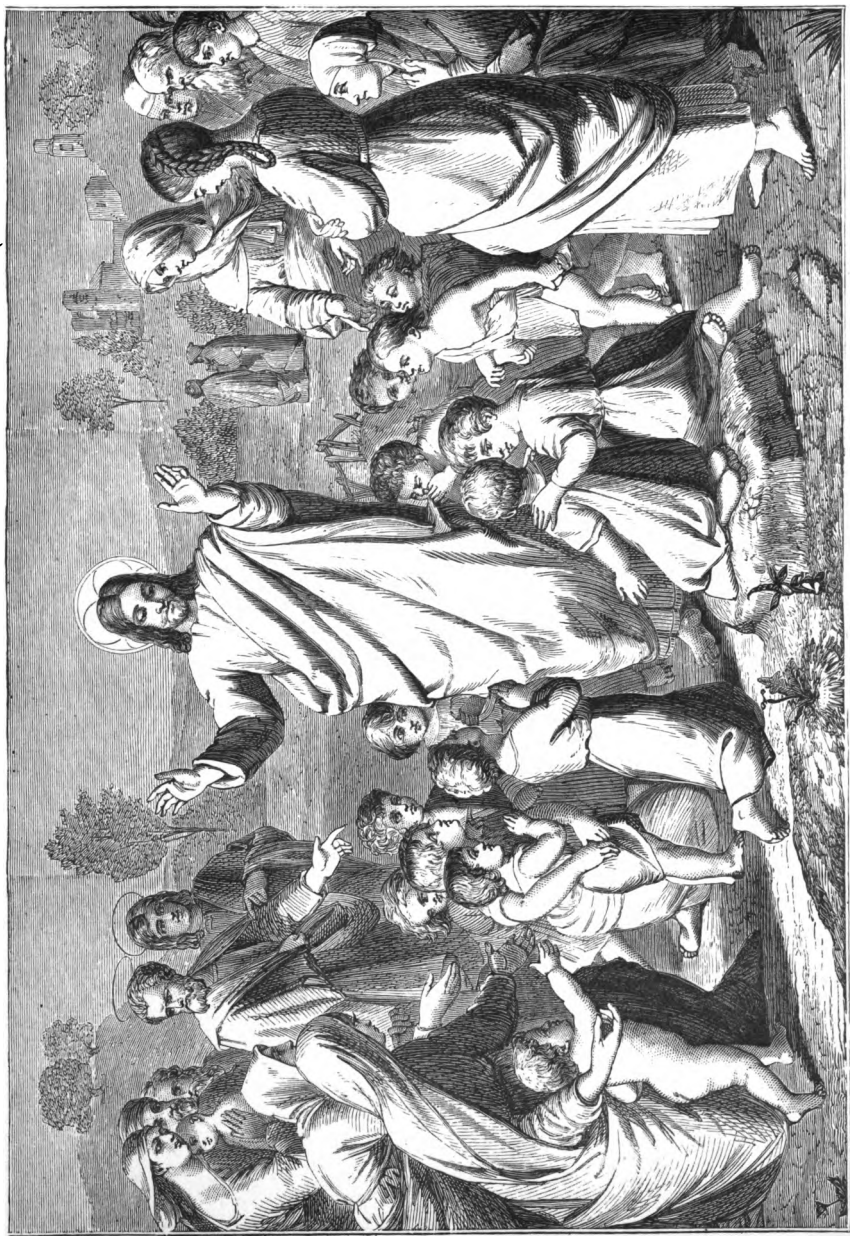
The style of art dominant in Rome during Overbeck's early residence did not materially differ from that which he had left behind him in Vienna. The Director, in fact, of the Viennese Academy had in youth won the prize of Rome, and there became the representative of the prevailing decadence. Among the Italians, Battoni, following in the footsteps of Carlo Maratti, was not without the grace and the beauty of Correggio and Guido. Descending a generation later, Overbeck found among his contemporaries Pietro Benvenuto, one of the most distinguished adherents of the school of David : whose master-

piece in Arezzo Cathedral has justly been designated "one of the finest productions of modern art." These were not men to be wholly despised. Furthermore it is to be remembered, as before indicated, that the Germans, in a generation only just passed away, had here in Rome formed a learned school based on the antique; Lessing, in his treatise, the 'Laocoon,' and Winckelmann, by his criticisms on the marbles of the Vatican, had induced a new Classic Renaissance. The painter Raphael Mengs, thus guided, appropriately executed in the Villa Albani the famous fresco of *Apollo and the Nine Muses on Mount Parnassus*. Again, here are men and manifestations not to be disdained. But for such art Overbeck, as we have seen, cherished inveterate antipathy: whether he was absolutely right, impartial critics, founding a judgment on a wide historic basis, will hesitate to determine. The correct verdict probably is that each school is good of its kind, that the one possesses merits distinctive of the other, and that it is well for the world that every mode of thought should in turn obtain the fullest and highest manifestation. But Overbeck's vision was too intently focussed on one point to perceive that his sphere was but a segment, a part, though by no means an unimportant part, of the greater whole. The classic movement, against which he set his face steadily, was not to be easily annihilated; it survived in Rome in such illustrious representatives as Canova, Thorwaldsen and Gibson. But Overbeck grew more and more the recluse; he shortly became a proselyte to the Romish Church, shut himself out from other associations, and thus after a time devoted his pencil exclusively to Christian Art.

The early pictures and drawings executed in Rome

carry out the painter's resolve. To this first period belong: *The Adoration of the Kings* (1811), *Jesus in the House of Martha and Mary* (1812), *The Preaching of St. John*, *The Raising of Lazarus*, *The Entombment*, *Christ Blessing Little Children*, *The Holy Family*, *Ave Maria*, *Blessed art thou among Women*, also a portrait of Vittoria Caldoni.* The first commission received by the struggling painter came from Queen Caroline of Bavaria for *The Adoration of the Kings*, in oils. The Queen had written to Rome saying that she wished for a picture by the young artist; that as to the price, a hard bargain need not be driven, for when one gains a beautiful work, the cost cannot be regretted. Overbeck, on receiving the good news, writes, Decem-

* The above compositions suggest the following observations. Overbeck was in the habit of making over many years replicas with variations and improvements of favourite themes, and the dates of the successive stages are not always easily determined. Of the *Preaching of St. John*, the Düsseldorf Academy possesses an example dated 1831. Also in the same collection is a mature and almost faultless drawing, fit companion for Raphael, of *The Raising of Lazarus*; the figure of Christ is 9 inches high. Overbeck made several renderings of the universally-beloved composition, *Christ Blessing Little Children*: the most deliberate is that given in these pages. The replica in the Meyer Collection, Hamburg, is of the last decade of the artist's life, and betrays infirmity of hand. *The Entombment*, classed above among works of the first Roman period, is probably that now in the choice collection at Stift Neuburg, near Heidelberg, dated 1814, and obviously suggested by Raphael's *Entombment* in the Borghese Palace. No drawings have better pedigree than those in this old family mansion: a predecessor of the present possessor was the artist's personal friend. The version of *The Bearing to the Sepulchre* given in these pages is from one of the forty well-known drawings of the Gospels, and dates 1844. At Stift Neuburg I also saw in the autumn of 1880, by the courtesy of the owner, Graf von Bernus, the drawing for the *Holy Family*, chosen as an illustration to this volume; it is of utmost delicacy and beauty—the motive has evidently been borrowed from Raphael; the measurement is 1 foot 3 inches by 1 foot 8 inches.



CHRIST BLESSING LITTLE CHILDREN.

ber 16, 1811, "I was so overpowered with joy that I could not bring out a syllable. The affair moves me all the more because I had not dreamt of it. What can be the cause of my good fortune? Happy day! I shall think of it as long as I live: to the Lord be the praise." Four days later he writes to Lübeck:—"What joy! I can now relieve my parents from further burden. This is the moment so long wished for. Henceforth and for ever I am a man and an independent artist in the workshop, free as a king over the boundless domain of fantasy to create a beautiful world."

The maxim that correct drawing lies at the foundation of all true art was maintained by the Brotherhood through both precept and example. Overbeck first mastered form, he trained his hand to outline; next he learnt the principles of composition, that is the power of combining separate parts into a connected whole; lastly, he added colour, but rather as an accessory than an essential. Hence his water-colours and even his oil-pictures are often little more than tinted drawings. In the first Roman period, that is up to about the year 1820, when the age of thirty had been reached, we find the artist in full possession of the faculty of expressing his ideas at the point of his pencil. Of this happy facility many examples have come before me: one especially, at Stift Neuburg, *The Raising of Jairus's Daughter* (1814); another, almost a replica of the last, delicately washed with colour, in the private collection of Herr Malss, of the Städel Institute, Frankfort. I note with admiration the precision and subtlety of the form, especially in the hands and feet. The work, though small in scale (1 ft. 3 in. by 1 ft.), is large in manner, the treatment being that of

the Great Masters as distinguished from the Small Masters. Overbeck, who was on intimate terms with the family of Director Malss, said that he wished they should have a work as perfect as he could make it: verily he realised his endeavour. Belonging to the same period, I find in another private collection in Frankfort a portrait in delicate pencilling of a young girl of about eighteen; the hair is in close curls all round the head, the necklace is marked with utmost detail. Perhaps I have not laid sufficient stress on the truth and rectitude of Overbeck's work, as seen, for instance, in the *Head of an Old Monk* among the drawings of the National Gallery, Berlin. This is so close to nature that a deformity in one ear has been conscientiously registered. The handling here is masterly, the touch firm and strong; the play of lines in the hatchings proves a free hand and a facile turn of the wrist. Also may be mentioned, for incidents taken from the life, a remarkable composition at Stift Neuburg, *The Feeding of the Hungry*. Close to nature are these transcripts of the poor, the needy, and aged, one advancing on crutches to receive bounty; and over all presides the spirit of beauty and charity. Also in the same collection is a triptych, wherein angels and cherubs appear: this is among the earliest examples of the intervention of the supernatural. Overbeck was not the man to rush in where angels fear to tread. Likewise among Biblical subjects, I find in the National Gallery, Berlin, *The Creation of Adam and Eve*, and *The Expulsion from Paradise*. Here the delineation of the undraped figure proves absolute knowledge, and shows, as before said, that the usual course of drawing from the nude had been gone through. The point indeed need not be discussed further, as

Schadow expressly states that Overbeck's drawings from the nude as well as from the draped figure were, for subtlety and truth to nature, the admiration of every one. The *Creation* and *Expulsion* are of exceptional value, because the artist for once borrows from Michelangelo: also it will be seen that Overbeck gave himself from the outset to the illustration of the Biblical narrative, and thus fondly trod in the footsteps of Giotto and Fra Angelico.

An Exhibition of the works of the German painters in Rome was held in 1819, in a room of the Palazzo Caffarelli, which, as the official residence of Niebuhr and Bunsen, had often been a spot of kindly meeting and hospitality. The collection Frederick Schlegel pronounced unsurpassed in richness, variety, and intrinsic value. Public interest was awakened, and attention centred round the contributions of Overbeck, Schadow, Veit and Cornelius. Overbeck sent a *Madonna* and a *Flight into Egypt*; and Schlegel specially names the cartoon of *Jerusalem Delivered*, for the frescoes then in progress at the Villa Massimo, as proof of the artist's power of expression and faculty of invention. He adds: "The struggle of the German artists in Rome daily excites more and more observation, and their progress is watched with cordial sympathy by men of all nations."

A very serious topic must now be considered. Overbeck in 1813 relinquished the Protestant faith of his forefathers and joined the Roman Catholic Church. Obviously in these pages polemics are out of place, and the step which the conscientious painter thought fit to take has to be here noted so far only as it serves as an index to character and as an interpretation of art. Rightly to judge the case, it were well correctly to estimate Overbeck as a man: his

strength lay within his art, outside which he had infirmities; his bodily health was feeble, his mind to the extreme refined and to the last degree sensitive; he shrank from the conflict of life; common people he could not associate with; for the ordinary world he was wholly unfit, and sought refuge in some ideal not yet reached. Niebuhr truly reads the character when he writes: "Overbeck is an enthusiast and quite illiberal; he is a very amiable man and endowed with a magnificent imagination, but incapable by nature of standing alone, and by no means so clear-headed as he is poetical. He bends easily and naturally under the yoke of the Catholic faith."

Overbeck doubtless felt all the more need of safe anchorage from the sea of troubles on which many minds were cast through the controversy and scepticism which agitated Protestant Europe. In Lübeck, as we have seen, the phases of faith were philosophic and æsthetic, and the divinities of Olympus and Parnassus shared equal favour with the saints of the Church. The young painter was cast in a severer mould, and needed that the infinite and eternal should be circumscribed by definite form. It is reported of a certain German philosopher that, when addressing his class, he ended with the words:—"In the next lecture we shall proceed to construct God!" Overbeck preferred to such speculation the authority of the Church. The painter Joseph Führich puts the case strongly: * he declares that his friend had to take the choice between Pantheism and Catholicism. Overbeck felt that art was a religious question, and he determined that all his work should be a protest against the indif-

* See 'Autobiography of Joseph Führich,' published in Vienna and Pesth, 1875.

ferentism and latitudinarianism which account all religions equal. He conceded that secular writings and mundane arts were not without their value and charm; in the arts may be permitted divers manifestations, such as landscape, animal, and flower painting. The Church is tolerant of all that is good, but on the highest pinnacle stands the Christian painter. Over these matters he had pondered long, and was accustomed to say to himself, "Let not my Christ be ever robbed of my love; the true home of art is within the soul before the altar of the Church; the tabernacle of art has its foundations in the worship of God."

Early Christian Art naturally drew Overbeck towards the Roman Catholic Church. Frederick Schlegel, Rio, Pugin severally fell under the same spell. The old mosaics, frescoes, and easel pictures which came down through unbroken ecclesiastical descent, were for the Christian artist of the nineteenth century means of grace, and served as revelations of the Divine. Fra Angelico was taken as a pattern; through living and loving, watching and praying, believing and working, the High Priesthood of Art was to be established. And the actual experiences of modern Rome brought no disillusion; the frivolity and the hollowness which so often disgust newcomers were either not seen or were turned aside from. The painter was too pure and childlike to realise the evil, he turned only to the good: for him the world shone as a land of light; from art he would exorcise the passions; the true art-life blended heaven with earth, the ideal could be attained only through the Church: her teachings were the education of humanity.

The decisive step ultimately taken is recorded as follows: "Overbeck at Whitsuntide in the year 1813

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joined the Catholic Faith, and with joy entered into the family of the world's Church. His spiritual guide and confessor was Professor, afterwards Cardinal, Ostini; and the poet Zacharias Werner, of Königsberg, as a fellow-countryman from the shores of the northern sea, acted as godfather at the ceremony. The poet, in writing at the time to the Prince Primate of Dalberg, said that he recognised in the young painter 'a true seraphic character of the Fatherland.' " *

A veritable mental epidemic seized on the German artists, and when one after another of Overbeck's friends followed his example, Niebuhr took alarm, and bethought himself of what measures could be taken. It appears that a pamphlet had been published intended expressly for the conversion of the young Germans, and Niebuhr, feeling the emergency of the situation, requested a friend to bring or send Luther's works with other writings against Popery. He adds: "It cannot be expressed how disgusting these proceedings become the more you see of them. At this moment the proselytes have Schadow, one of the ablest of the young artists, on their bait." At a later date he writes: "I like Overbeck and the two Schadows much, and they are estimable both as artists and as men; but the Catholicism of Overbeck and one of the Schadows excludes entirely many topics of conversation." Overbeck is elsewhere described as of "very prepossessing physiognomy, taciturn and melancholy," with a "proselyting spirit." Bunsen, who no less than Niebuhr deplored these conversions, writes in 1817 that Overbeck had been for a fortnight in August a welcome guest at Frascati, that

* See 'Historisch-Politische Blätter für das Katholische Deutschland,' vol. lvi., part 8. Munich, 1870.

he had finished a water-colour drawing—a very lovely Madonna with the infant Jesus—“of which he permitted a copy to be taken, still extant, and valued as a record of the time and of the short-lived intimacy with the gentle and heavenly-minded artist, who soon after this period withdrew from all companions of a different religious persuasion from that which he had adopted.” Among the chief converts are numbered the brothers Schadow, Veit, Platner, and the critic Frederick Schlegel. Cornelius is not included, because he was born into Catholicism. He is described as of “an open and powerful intellect, free from all limitations,” “with habits and convictions rooted as the facts of his existence.” He thus looked on coolly while the new converts were at fever-heat. Yet it is pleasant to know that these controversies were, in the main, preserved from personal bitterness, and that whatever might be the difference in creeds, the broad union of religion and humanity was never torn asunder. Thus in 1817 Niebuhr, a Protestant and possibly something more, was able to write: “I associate chiefly, indeed almost exclusively, with the artists who belong to the religious party, because those who are decidedly pious, or who strive after piety, are by far the noblest and best men, and also the most intellectual, and this gives me an opportunity of hearing a good deal on faith and its true nature.” And the faith of these men we know to have brought forth good works; as were their belief and their practice, such were their pictures, and it is scarcely here the place to discuss whether larger views might have given to their art wider extension.

By a curious coincidence, about the time when these conversions to Roman Catholicism were going on in Rome

the third jubilee of the Reformation was celebrated at Lübeck. The pietist father of the painter made himself champion of the cause, and delivered a speech at a meeting of the Bible Society, wherein he proclaimed Luther the great witness of truth. "Luther," he declared, "spoke, wrote, thundered, and the power of darkness was overturned; thus conscience became free, doctrines were purified, and the precious Bible, as a heavenly treasure, was given back to the people."* It has been assigned as a reason why Overbeck never returned home, that he could not bear to see the city of Lübeck with her old walls thrown down; but a less fanciful cause was that other walls than those of brick and mortar had been set up, dividing kindred and friends.

Let us now turn from polemics to the pleasing descriptions given by Niebuhr and Bunsen of the daily lives of the German Brotherhood. It is not always that archæologists and literary men are the soundest counsellors of artists; they place overmuch stress on the inward conception and motive; they lay down, like Coleridge, the axiom that "a picture is an intermediate something between a thought and a thing," and in exalting the "thought" they subordinate the "thing." This was the last teaching that Overbeck needed. He and his fellows were already only too prone to ignore technique, to neglect colour, chiaroscuro, texture. They deemed it all-sufficient to perfect form as the language of thought; consequently while their works instruct and elevate, they fail to please or to gain wide popularity.

Nevertheless, taken for all in all, Overbeck and Cornelius must be accounted most fortunate in their intel-

* See 'Erinnerung an Christian Adolph Overbeck,' Lübeck, 1830.

lectual companionship. The habit was, when gathered socially together at the Embassy in the Palazzo Caffarelli, to read books, talk of pictures, and to consort together generally for the furtherance of the great art revival in which Niebuhr and Bunsen believed fervently. The attachment became mutual, the intercourse was prized on both sides. Niebuhr writes of Cornelius and his wife: "They are, strictly speaking, intimate family friends;" and again he says: "The society of Cornelius and Overbeck gives an inspiring variety to the day's occupations, and one or other of these intellectual companions seldom fails to join our evening walks." In another letter we read: "Cornelius of Düsseldorf, Platner from Leipzig, Koch from the Tyrol, Overbeck from Lübeck, Mosler from Coblenz, and William Schadow from Berlin, were assembled at Bunsen's in the apartments of the painter Brandis: in different ways and degrees we are attached to them all, and we think them men of talent. Their society is the only pleasure we derive from human beings in Rome." The young artists are found to be wholly without worldly wisdom, a charge to which at least Overbeck might readily plead guilty. Niebuhr further declares: "I confidently believe we are on the eve of a new era of Art in Germany, similar to the sudden bloom of our literature in the eighteenth century." He discerned in the movement an unaccustomed spiritual phenomenon—one of those manifestations of the national mind from time to time found in the history of humanity. He felt once more an outburst of the intellectual life of Germany, a rising again of the force of genius which had impelled Lessing, Kant, and Goethe, which had given birth to profound philosophy and science, and had animated

a whole people with patriotism and a spirit of self-sacrifice to do battle amid national songs and hymns, even to the death, in the cause of the King and the Fatherland. Bunsen testifies how Niebuhr showed his affection and care for the Prussian and German disciples of art; he considered it an agreeable part of his duty and vocation to render them assistance, to encourage them in their studies, to give them the time of which he was so sparing to men of mere show and fashion, also to render them pecuniary assistance when necessary. To Niebuhr belongs the honour of having been the first to recognise the new school at the moment when it was "despised, derided, and vituperated." He befriended the men who had to fight their way against shallowness and wickedness, against the low and false taste of connoisseurs and patrons, till the day came when the martyrs of an exalted aspiration gained the attention and admiration of the world.

Nor in numbering friends must be forgotten Frederick Schlegel, the avowed champion of the new school. The critic was not without connecting links and antecedents; he had made himself son-in-law of the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, and stepfather of the painter Philip Veit; and he further qualified himself for his critical duties by joining the Roman Catholic Church. Overbeck and this rhapsodist on Christian Art were naturally close allies; each was of use to the other, and gave and received in turns. The artist strove, it is said, to embody in pictorial form his friend's teachings; the two, in fact, moved in parallel lines. Schlegel urged that the new style must be emulative and aspiring, ever possessed of lofty ideas. Believe not, he writes, that the glory of

art has passed away. The hope is not vain that there comes a rekindling of former fires; art uprising from the dark night breaks as the morning's dawn; "a new life can spring only from the depths of a new love." Let us hold that Art like Nature renews her youth. The soul alone can comprehend the truly beautiful; the eye gazes but on the material veil—the union of the inner soul with the outward form constitutes the noblest art. Nowhere are to be found more eloquent utterances on "the Bond between Art and the Church," but in all is overlooked the simple fact that "the Celestial light" cannot be made appreciable to mortal eye otherwise than through the medium of matter, and according to the laws of vision. And to such oversight is greatly to be ascribed the infirmities of Overbeck and his school. It is forgotten that the most holy of motives cannot save a picture which is not good as a picture. Schlegel discusses the question, What is needed by the Christian painter? The following phrenzy, though wordy, is worth reading:—

"The answer is that the beautiful truths of the Christian faith should not be received into the mind as merely lifeless forms, in passive acquiescence to the teaching of others: they must be embraced with an earnest conviction of their truth and reality, and bound up with each individual feeling of the painter's soul. Still even the influence of devotion is not alone sufficient; for however entirely religion may be felt to compensate for all that is wanting to our earthly happiness, much more is required to form a painter. I know not how better to designate that other element, without which mere technical skill, and even correct ideas, will be unavailing, than by calling it the inborn light of inspiration. It is something quite

distinct from fertility of invention, or magic of colouring, rare and valuable as is the latter quality in painting. It is no less distinct from skill in the technicalities of design and from the natural feeling for beauty inherent in some susceptible minds. The poet and the musician should also be inspired, but their inspiration is more the offspring of human emotion; the painter's inspiration must be an emanation of celestial light: his very soul must, so to speak, become itself illumined, a glowing centre of holy radiance, in whose bright beams every material object should be reflected; and even his inmost conceptions and daily thoughts must be interpenetrated by its brightness and remodelled by its power. This indwelling light of the soul should be recognised in every creation of his pencil, expressive as a spoken word; and in this lies the peculiar vitality of Christian beauty, and the cause of the remarkable difference between Classic and Christian art." "Physical beauty is employed by the Christian painter but as a material veil, from beneath which the hidden divinity of the soul shines forth, illuminating all mortal life with the higher spirituality of love."

A kindly and timely commission came to the masters of the German Brotherhood—Overbeck, Cornelius, Veit, and Schadow—from the Prussian Consul, Bartholdi. Personal relations, with the desire of giving the untried painters an opportunity of proving what good was in them, prompted the charge to decorate with frescoes a room in the Casa Bartholdi, situated on the brow of the Pincian Hill.* The Prussian Consul was in a roundabout

* The Casa Bartholdi has for some years been let as lodgings to a superior class of travellers, and is much favoured by the English.

way connected with Philip Veit and Frederick Schlegel, whose mutual relationship has been already recounted; his wife was sister of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn, and aunt of the illustrious musician, and sundry intermarriages had made, as it were, a compact in literature and art between the families of Bartholdi, Mendelssohn, Veit, and Schlegel.* The chosen sphere of operations was comparatively narrow; the small room in an upper story, now of historic interest, is not more than twenty-four feet square. The situation is inviting; the beauties of nature are usually found proximate with the beauties of art, and here the windows command a panorama sweeping from the Pincian to the Tiber, and embracing St. Peter's, the Vatican, St. Angelo, and the Capitol. The topic chosen for these wall pictures was the *Story of Joseph and his Brethren*—a theme conveniently accommodating to any existing diversities in creeds or styles. The technical process adopted was fresco, a monumental art, the revival of which formed part of the mission of the German fraternity. The arduous undertaking was commenced and carried out in strict accordance with historic precedents. Preliminary studies were made, and well-

The rooms are not always accessible; the servants have been known to name, as the most convenient time for seeing the frescoes, Sunday mornings, when the tenants are attending the English Church. The Painted Chamber is suitably furnished for daily uses; *The History of Joseph*, which covers the walls, is not too serious a theme to mingle with the common avocations of domestic life: fresco-painting, in fact, is not only a national and an ecclesiastic, but likewise a domestic art.

* The Royal Academy Exhibition, Berlin, 1880, contained a large coloured design for the decoration of the ceiling of the Villa Mendelssohn-Bartholdy. Thus the joint names over a period of more than half a century stand conspicuous among art-patrons.

matured cartoons on the scale of the ultimate pictures were perfected. To the lot of Overbeck fell *Joseph sold by his Brethren*,* and *The Seven Years of Famine*.

It has been my pleasure to visit and revisit these wall-paintings over a period of a quarter of a century, and growing experience does but enhance my admiration. They fulfil the first requirements of wall decoration: the story is told lucidly and concisely; the style is simple, noble; accidents are held subordinate to essentials; the compositions are distributed symmetrically; the colour, though a little crude, is brought into somewhat agreeable unity; the light and shade are not focussed at one point, but carried evenly over the whole surface; and the treatment inclines sufficiently to the flat to keep the compositions down on the wall. The finished pictures of the four masters vary in dimensions. The lengths range from eight to seventeen feet, the height is mostly about eight feet; the figures do not exceed five feet. The lines bounding the figures and draperies are firm and incisive. Accordant with the practice of the old fresco-painters, each day's work is marked and discernible by the joinings in the plaster, and the junctions between the dry

* Overbeck's cartoon in charcoal on paper of *Joseph sold by his Brethren* is carefully preserved under glass in the Städel Institute, Frankfort, where I examined it in 1880: the width is 11 feet, the height 8 feet, the figures are about 5 feet. The outlines are firmly accentuated; the details sufficient without being elaborate; the figure, as proved specially in the arms, hands, legs, and feet, is perfectly understood; the draperies are cast simply and broadly; the heads of noble type are impressed with thought. Not a false touch appears throughout; the crayon is guided by knowledge; evidently preliminary studies and tentative drawings must have preceded this consummated product. No wonder that this cartoon made a deep impression; nothing had been seen at all like it in Rome for very many years.

plaster of one day and the wet plaster of the next are appropriately fixed at the points where the subject breaks off readily and can be resumed most easily. The technique is thoroughly mastered, and, barring some surface cracks, the paintings are in as perfect condition as when they came from the artists' hands. The chief defect is a somewhat crude opacity of pigments, a characteristic belonging to the debased period of wall-painting rather than to the "*fresco buono et puro*" of Giotto, Luini, and Pinturicchio.

Another point to be remarked is that the frescoes in the Casa Bartholdi show that the four painters—Overbeck, Cornelius, Veit, and Schadow—worked here at the outset of their career in remarkable unison. In the course of years they diverged widely, but as yet the school collectively dominates over the artist individually. The Brethren had formed themselves equally on the same originals, and had scarcely found time to take their several departures from nature. Indeed, the actual presence of nature comes almost as a surprise in these compositions. Overbeck's figures are manifestly more or less studied from the life, only, according to his habitual practice, he has taken pains to eliminate from his models any individual accidents which marred the generic form, softening down angularity and ruggedness into pervading grace and beauty. Here and there are traces of affectation, together with a feebleness incident to the painter's weak physique which stands in utmost contrast with the force of Cornelius. Overbeck mostly shunned action and dramatic intensity, and here the figures in their movements depart but slightly from the equilibrium of repose. As a religious artist, the New Testament was more within his sphere than the Old. Thus the outrage committed

against Joseph by his brethren is toned down into a calm, orderly transaction; placidity reigns throughout; all is brought into keeping with the painter's spirit of gentleness.

The Casa Bartholdi frescoes,* when finished, produced a most favourable impression in Rome; the cause of the Germans was greatly strengthened, and the opposite party felt the defeat. The Italians, too, were taken by surprise to find themselves beaten by foreigners on their own ground. A natural consequence of the success was further commissions, and the fortune no less than the fame of the revivalists was made. Singularly enough the modern Romans came forward as the next patrons. Niebuhr, writing from Rome in 1817, says: "It is a significant fact that some foreigners, even Italians, are beginning to pay attention to the works of our friends." It is well known that the Romans had been addicted for centuries to mural painting in palaces, villas and garden-houses: Raphael was employed to decorate the Farnesina; Guido and Annibale Carracci painted the ceilings of the Farnese and of the Rospigliosi Palaces. Emulating these illustrious examples, Prince Massimo commissioned Overbeck, Cornelius, Veit, and Schnorr to cover the walls and ceilings of his Garden Pavilion near St. John Lateran with frescoes illustrative of Tasso, Dante, and Ariosto. Not only the themes, but the local surroundings were inspiring. The Villa Massimo is a site only possible in Rome. When the artists in the morning came to work, before their view opened a panorama embracing the Claudian Aqueduct, St. John Lateran, the Church of Sta. Croce in Gerusalemme, the old Walls of Rome, with

* Many are the authors who have written on the Casa Bartholdi frescoes, the chief authorities are Hagen, Förster, Reber, and Riegel.

cypresses and stone pines around, and the Alban Hills beyond. The Pavilion assigned to the painters stands in the Villa garden, with the accustomed growth and fragrance of orange-trees, magnolias, azaleas, roses, and violets. Overbeck entered on the work with poetic ardour.

The Massimo Pavilion is little more than three rooms standing on the ground; the first, indeed, is an Entrance Hall, and therein Schnorr painted copiously from Ariosto. On the left a door leads to the room assigned to Cornelius for the illustration of Dante: the ceiling fell to the lot of Veit. On the right another door opens to a corresponding room of like dimensions, set apart to Overbeck and Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*.^{*} This small interior is not more than fifteen feet square, and the wall-spaces are much broken up by doors and windows, so that only one of the four sides remained disencumbered. The compositions are eleven in number, and are unequal alike in size and merit. The largest and most noteworthy is fifteen feet long by ten feet high, representing the *Meeting of Godfrey de Bouillon and Peter the Hermit*. The narrative is lucidly told, the picture well put together, and the successive planes of distance are duly marked. Altogether the fundamental principles of wall-decoration are clearly understood in this the most complex composition yet attempted by the painter. Another thoroughly studied design is *Sophronio and Olindo on the Funeral Pyre delivered by Clorinda*.[†] The action has more than usual

^{*} See among authorities before named, 'Geschichte des Wiederauflebens der deutschen Kunst zu Ende des 18. und Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts, von Hermann Riegel.' Hannover, 1876.

[†] The cartoon for this fresco is in the Leipzig Museum, where I examined it in 1880. It is in chalk on whitey-brown paper, in squares and mounted on canvas; length 15 feet by 7 feet. As a mature study

force and movement, and the undraped figures are drawn with severe exactitude. Presiding over the whole series, in the middle of the ceiling, is an allegorical figure of *Jerusalem Delivered*. * An angel on either side unlooses the fetters of an innocent placid maiden crowned with thorns. These frescoes, notwithstanding their situation in a cold, damp garden-house, remained, when I saw them last, in January, 1878, in sound condition : thus once more we find Overbeck, equally with Cornelius, to have been solidly grounded in the method of wall-painting.

I must confess that I have always been disappointed with this Tasso Room.† One reason is that the carrying out of the original designs was delegated to an inferior brush. Overbeck was not in strong health ; he worked slowly, and when other commissions came in, some more to his liking, such as that for the church picture at Assisi, he felt overburdened, and wished to be released from a task that had grown wearisome. The work, began about 1817, had dragged on for ten years, till at last Overbeck made a deliberate call on good and friendly Joseph Führich, and requested that he would complete the unfinished frescoes. The proposal, naturally felt as an honour, was gratefully acceded to. After this distance of

of form and composition it is just what a cartoon should be, but the touch is feeble and poor. Like most of Overbeck's designs, it has received the tribute of engraving.

* The cartoon was acquired for the National Gallery, Berlin, in 1878, at the price of 37*l.* 10*s.* 0*d.* ; measurement 6 feet by 4 feet : it has been engraved.

† Persistent difficulties are placed in the way of even students who desire to visit these frescoes ; the public are systematically excluded from the Villa Massimo, and on two occasions, when after much trouble I gained orders for admission, the attendant, in accordance with instructions, forbade the taking of notes.

time it becomes difficult to determine how far this worthy substitute must be held responsible for much that is to be regretted on these walls. For some of the compositions the master had made nothing more than sketches or indications, and at least three must be laid to the charge of the scholar. Führich was for Overbeck what Giulio Romano had been for Raphael, and the Tasso Room suffered the same degradation as the latest stanza in the Vatican.

The Tasso Room may be taken as a measure of Overbeck's capacity. This "cycclus," or series, shows the painter's power of sustained thought and faculty of invention. Much, doubtless, is compilation, yet something remains of originality. The best passages are those not borrowed from old pictures, but taken from life, which makes the regret all the greater that here and in the sequel nature was not trusted more implicitly. On the whole, these compositions leave the impression that Overbeck had not mental force or physical stamina sufficient for the task. It is true that the presence of a lyrical spirit is felt; but scenes of Romance need more fire and passion; the deeds of Chivalry were not enacted in a cloister. Perhaps self-knowledge wisely counselled Overbeck to quit the regions of creative imagination. With greater peace of mind he trod in the future, the safer paths of Christian Art, wherein precedent and authority served as his guide and support.





CHAPTER III.

ROME—GERMANY.

THE life of Overbeck apportioned itself into successive periods of five, ten, or more years, corresponding to the important works from time to time in hand. The painter threw his whole mind into whatever he undertook, and so his pictures in their conception, and even in their execution, reflect the thought and the state of consciousness which for the while held supreme sway. The preceding chapters treat of two periods; the one describes the early times in Lübeck and Vienna, the other presents a sketch of the first decade in Rome. The foundations have been laid; the main principles for the guidance of a true life and for the building up of a soul-moving art have been firmly fixed; and now it remains to be seen how far and in what way the lofty aim was reached.

Overbeck, as soon as his prospects in life became somewhat assured, married. Little is recorded of the wife: the earliest mention I have met with is in 1818, when the artists in Rome gave a grand fête in honour of the Crown Prince of Bavaria. Overbeck and Cornelius furnished designs for pictorial decorations and transparencies: the guests wore mediæval costumes, and made themselves



THE CALLING OF ST. JAMES AND ST. JOHN.

otherwise attractive; and we learn on the authority of Madame Bunsen that among the brilliant assembly "the most admired of the evening was Overbeck's future wife, a lady beautiful, engaging, and influential, from Vienna." * The marriage, which was not long delayed, proved on the whole happy, though the wife's delicate health gave constant cause for anxiety, and her other demands on an indulgent husband are said to have provoked the displeasure of Cornelius and other friends. Two children were the fruits of the union: a girl, who died young, and a boy, who lived only long enough to give singular promise.

Overbeck, as we have seen, had, in common with his brethren, given his best powers to "monumental painting." For this noble and "architectonic art" he was not without qualifications. He moved in an exalted sphere, his mind ranged among immutable truths, his forms were high in type, his compositions had symmetry and concentration, he knew how to adapt lines and masses to structural spaces. An occasion calculated to call forth his powers came with the commission to paint in fresco *The Vision of St. Francis* for the church of Sta. Maria

* For further particulars as to Overbeck's wife, "Nina," see 'Erinnerungen und Leben der Malerin Louise Seidler,' Berlin, Verlag von Wilhelm Hertz, 1875. According to this authority the young lady was the illegitimate daughter of a gentleman of aristocratic family in Vienna, from whom she received a dowry. She had come to Rome in search of health, and possessing talents, accomplishments and charms, and being withal a "fanatic Catholic," she won the affections of the impressive painter. "The young couple," we are told, passed "a soul-satisfying" honeymoon, and took up their abode in the Villa Palombara, near the Baths of Diocletian. In the private collection of Herr Bockenheimer, Frankfort, I have found an exquisite drawing, wherein the artist is said to have depicted himself, his wife, and two children.

degli Angeli, near Assisi. Overbeck here, as his custom was, remained obedient to tradition, and yet struck out a new path; he was not content to retrace the footsteps of Giotto or of Cigoli, he preferred to depict the vision of his own mind. He enthrones the Madonna as Queen of Heaven, seated by the side of the risen Saviour, surrounded by the angelic hosts. On the lower earth, also attended by angels, appears St. Francis in adoration, while on the other side kneel reverently two mendicant friars. The picture belongs to the middle period, when the artist had attained the mature age of forty: the style, speaking historically, is that of the grave and severely defined Florentine school as represented by the Brancacci chapel. The fresco has been accounted by some the painter's masterpiece, and it is pronounced by Count Raczyński as one of the few works of modern days worthy of transmission to future ages.*

Overbeck, it is easy to believe, while painting on the

* Mrs. Jameson, in 'The Legends of the Monastic Orders,' illustrates the visions and ecstasies of St. Francis from the pictures of Giotto and others down to Domenichino. Coming to our times, the only work found worthy of such companionship is that of Overbeck. The modern German does not suffer by comparison with the old Italian masters. The fresco was finished 1830; shortly after, an earthquake visited the spot and destroyed a large portion of the church, but *The Vision of St. Francis* remained intact. The cartoon for the picture is in the Library, Lübeck, framed, hung, but badly seen. I examined and noted it October 1880. It is in chalk, on paper mounted on canvas; the form is lunette, the base about 20 feet broad; the figures are life-size. The heads, hands and draperies are thoroughly studied in a broad, large manner. The work when exhibited in Munich in 1831, on the artist's visit to Germany, obtained high commendation. The oil study made for the colour is now in the Leipzig Museum: measurement, 2 feet 3 inches by 2 feet 7 inches. The cartoon has been lithographed by Koch: the fresco itself is photographed.

very spot where St. Francis was in ecstasy, led a life much to his liking. He dwelt within the monastery, and his pure mind, open only to the good, was blind to the dissolute ways of monks who became a scandal to the district. When the fresco was half finished, the master received a visit from his bosom friends Steinle and Führich, and the three strengthened one another as they communed on religion and the arts. Overbeck is known to have had leanings towards a convent life, and at one time, when seriously thinking of taking the vow, he received from the Pope friendly admonition that his true mission lay within his art, and that by renouncing the world his usefulness would be lessened. It can scarcely, however, be doubted that asceticism became so much the habit of his life as to afflict his mental condition, and to impoverish his art. Some critics indeed point to the early picture of *The Seven Years of Famine* as the origin of a certain starved aspect in subsequent compositions. Pharaoh's lean kine have been supposed to symbolise the painter, and the spare fare within the cells of St. Francis served to confirm the persuasion that flesh and blood, in art as in life, must be kept in subjection. Nevertheless, I for one, when on the spot, could not but revere the pictorial outcome; when first I made acquaintance with this plenary revelation of the painter, I had been taking a walking-tour, knapsack on back, through the Umbrian hills and valleys, the birth-land of St. Francis; I had become acquainted with the wall and panel paintings of Giotto, Gentile di Fabriano, Perugino, Giovanni Santi, and the youthful Raphael; and while looking on this heavenly "Vision," I could not but feel that Overbeck ranked among the holy company. Unlike

most modern painters, surely he had not to worship in the outer court of the Gentiles.

Overbeck received repeated solicitations to return to Germany: he was asked in 1821 by Cornelius to take the directorship of the Düsseldorf Academy, and four years later he writes in reply to the further persuasions of Wintergerst and Mosler. He urges his incapacity for the duties: he had learnt painting, he says, in a way difficult to impart to others; moreover, sculpture and architecture he did not understand at all, and as for the business matters he was without faculty. Further difficulties were the health of his wife and the welfare of his son: "every information," he continues, "I receive from my native country tells me of spiritual fermentations: the sanctuary, insufficiently protected by the law, suffers under attacks, and a proud worldly spirit raises its head and proclaims its wisdom. Can parents be blind to the risks to which they expose their child, till now reared in the most delightful simplicity of belief? Dearest friends, can you give us the assurance that we shall be able to educate our son in the simple Catholic faith which we have learnt to recognise as the most vital and consoling." Overbeck, it need hardly be added, shrank from the dangers and declined the duties.

But, at length, free from pressing and onerous commissions, he lent a more willing ear to invitations from Germany. Cornelius in 1830 had come to Rome from Munich, the better to complete certain cartoons; with him were a daughter, also his wife, who had under charge Fräulein Emilie Linder, a young lady of Basle, of some means and given to pictorial pursuits. Overbeck, on the completion of his wall-painting at Assisi, rejoined the

brilliant art circle of the Roman capital, and from this time dates the memorable friendship between the lady, then a Protestant, and the great Catholic painter. After a winter pleasantly passed among congenial spirits, the whole party in the early summer of 1831 set out from Rome and reached Florence. Emilie Linder returned for a time to Basle, while Overbeck, under the care of Cornelius, by way of the Tyrol reached Munich. On the news of their approach in July, the local artists, young and old, assembled at the gates, outposts had been stationed along the road, and the townfolks gathered by thousands in the streets: from afar the cheering was heard, and then group after group raised the cry, "Overbeck!" "Cornelius!" The entry soon grew into a triumphal march, and, protests notwithstanding, the horses were unyoked, and a company of lusty youths drew the carriage to the dwelling of Cornelius.

Twenty years had elapsed since Overbeck, an unknown youth, had quitted his native land; he now returned with a world-wide reputation. Cornelius, once the sharer of his trials, became the equal recipient of the triumphs; he had just completed the grand series of frescoes for the Glyptothek, and with him were brought the cartoons elaborated in Rome for the wall-paintings in the new Ludwig Kirche. Overbeck, as the guest of his old friend, passed happy weeks in Munich. The two painters conferred closely together in the interests of Christian Art, and aided each other in the arduous works soon to be carried out. The artists of Bavaria signalised the visit of the apostle of Christian Painting by a jubilee; they gave in honour of the illustrious stranger one of those joyous and scenic fêtes for which Munich is famed. The locality

chosen was the Starnberger See, a lovely region of hill and lake lying in the Bavarian highlands, bordering on the Ammergau, peopled by peasants with sacred traditions since better known through "The Passion Play." Overbeck writes gratefully of enjoyment and instruction received through kind friends among the beauties of nature and of art.

The Roman recluse in his journey northwards had widely extended his knowledge of nature. On leaving the Apennines he encountered the Alps, and exchanged beauty for grandeur. His figures were often accompanied by landscapes; but mountains exceeding in altitude five or six thousand feet appalled his imagination; masses of such magnitude could not enter the smaller sphere of his consciousness; hence his northern peregrinations brought into his compositions no Alpine presences; indeed, his habitual serenity and simplicity were disturbed by dramatic stir or storm of the elements, and though his sympathies warmed under novel experiences, his art failed to take a new departure.

I have often when in Munich regretted that Overbeck had no share in the Bavarian manifestations of Christian Art. But that he, the head of the religious revival, is left out was simply his own fault. Cornelius, in 1821, when as director reorganising the Academy, wrote to his friend, asking assistance; King Ludwig also urged Overbeck to come. But the timorous artist as usual hesitated; he gave at first assent, conditional however on a delay of three years to complete works in hand; then he pleaded the impossibility of taking any step whatsoever without the sense of religious duty. The King naturally grew weary, and interpreted the equivocal dealing as a denial.

Cornelius again in 1833, when the new Basilica of St. Boniface needed decoration, once more proposed that his fellow-labourer in Rome should settle in Munich, but with no avail; the King evidently had little cordiality for the artist, and so employed others on the plea, not wholly tenable, that Overbeck was better in oil than in fresco. Thus the large acreage of wall surfaces dedicated to Christian Art in the churches of Munich and the Cathedral of Spire fell into the hands of Cornelius, Hess, and Schraudolph. It is impossible not to regret that this grand sphere was thus closed to the artist who of all others had most of beauty to reveal. Yet the sensitive painter might have encountered much to disturb his peace of mind. King Ludwig could not assuredly be quite the patron for a spiritual and esoteric artist, and, moreover, there was something too wholesale in the Munich way of going on for a man of limited strength. Overbeck, as I can testify, was about the last person to climb a giddy ladder or to endure a long day's drudgery before an acreage of wall fifty feet above the ground. He wisely did not overstep his bounds; he had not the wing of an eagle, and preferred to keep as a dove, near to the nest.

Nevertheless, Munich is not without witness to the spirit of the mystic and poetic painter. King Ludwig, himself at least a poetaster, hit upon a felicitous comparison, oft since reiterated, when he designated Overbeck the St. John and Cornelius the St. Paul in pictorial art. The two artists, like the two apostles, had a common faith, though a diverse calling, and their several works testify how greatly the one was indebted to the other. Overbeck brought with him to Bavaria a drawing of exceptional power, *Elias in the Chariot of Fire* (1827), a composition which reflects

as indubitably the greatness of Cornelius as Raphael's *Isaiah* responds to the grandeur of Michelangelo. But this lofty strain of inspiration proved transient, and Overbeck, as seen in Munich, truly personates the apostle who leant on the Saviour's breast. The New Pinakothek is fortunate in the possession of three pictures.* One is the *Portrait of Vittoria Caldoni*, already enumerated among earliest efforts; another is the *Holy Family*, illustrating these pages; the composition recalls Raphael's Florentine manner. The third, *Italy and Germany*, must be accounted exceptional because secular; the motive, however, rises above common life into symbolism. Two maidens in tender embrace are depicted seated in a landscape, the one blonde and homely, personifying Germania; the other dark and ideal, as if Tasso inspired, typical of Italia. The intention has given rise to interesting speculation. The German girl leans forward in earnest entreaty, while her Italian sister remains immobile and impenetrable. And herein some have seen shadowed forth a divided mind between two nationalities. Solicitations had come from Germany, yet, after moments of hesitation, Overbeck held fast to the land of his adoption, and his resolve may not inaptly find expression in "Italia," a figure which seems to say, "Vex not my spirit; leave me to rest in this land of peace and of beauty." But this composition is

* *Portrait of Vittoria Caldoni*, oil, on canvas, nearly life-size, about 3 feet by 2 feet. *Holy Family*, about 4 feet 6 inches by 3 feet: oil, on rough Roman canvas, signed "F. O. 1825": better colour than usual: in good condition, but, like many pictures in the New Pinakothek, revived by the Pettenkofer process: the beautiful engraving by Felsing has a sale quite unusual for Overbeck. "Italia und Germania," about 3 feet 5 inches by 2 feet 9 inches, oil, on canvas: manner hard and dry: lithographed by F. Piloty.

supposed to speak of yet wider experiences. The painter had given much time to the writing of a romance descriptive or symbolic of human life, wherein he embodied his own personal feelings and aspirations. The two principal characters in this unpublished story are said to be here depicted under the guise of "Italia and Germania." The composition thus becomes somewhat autobiographic.

Munich is identified with a friendship between Overbeck and a lady, which ranks among the most memorable of Platonic attachments. Fräulein Emilie Linder we have already encountered in Rome, where an abiding friendship was rooted, and the devoted lady, on separation, soon found occasion to open a correspondence which was prolonged over a period of thirty years. Overbeck was a persistent letter-writer; he wasted no time on society, and so gained leisure to write epistles and publish essays. And yet it cannot be said that, had he not been an artist, he would have shone as the brightest of authors. On the contrary, as with the majority of painters, he never acquired an adroitness of pen commensurate with his mastery in the use of his pencil; and it is certain that if his pictures had been without adorers, his prose would have remained without readers. The great painter was destitute of literary style; his sentences are cumbrous and confused; his pages grow wearisome by wordy repetition. Doubtless his thoughts are pure and elevated, but, lacking originality, they run into platitudes, and barely escape commonplace. The prolonged correspondence with Emilie Linder* contracts the flavour peculiar to polemics. Overbeck had grown into a "fanatic Catholic"; he was ever

* See 'Historisch-Politische Blätter für das Katholische Deutschland,' before quoted.

casting out nets to catch converts; his tactics were enticing; his own example proved persuasive. Moreover, about his mind and method was something effusive, which won on the hearts of emotional women. At all events, these letters brought over to the Roman Catholic Church the lady and others. And so it naturally came to pass that the bonds of union were drawn very close when the revered apostle and the devout disciple reposed within the same sheepfold. These letters have a further significance; they declare what indeed is otherwise well established, that the Catholic faith served as the prime moving power in the life and the art of Overbeck.

The painter brought to Munich ten or more drawings executed in Rome with a view to his travelling expenses, and Emilie Linder lost no time in making an offer for the set, to add to her private collection. The artist, with suitable diffidence, hesitated, yet looked on the proposal as an interposition of Providence, and then begged for the money at once, to help him on his further journey into Germany. Though success had delivered him from poverty, and commissions came in faster than he could paint, yet at no time did he roll in wealth; spite of scrupulous economy, he never much more than paid his way; and a few years later, when, for Emilie Linder, engaged on *The Death of St. Joseph*,* he gladly accepted

* *The Death of St. Joseph*, oil, on canvas, 3 feet by 2 feet 3 inches, was at last completed 1836, and appeared two years later in the Munich Exhibition: the price was less than 100l. A small drawing for the picture was, with others in the possession of Emilie Linder, lithographed for devotional purposes: the lady with characteristic generosity sent the proceeds of publication to the painter. On her death in 1867 her collection went by bequest to the Basle Museum, where are conserved, besides *The Death of St. Joseph*, ten drawings in pencil. Among the last are *God appearing to Elias on Mount Horeb*, *The Finding*





beforehand the price by instalments. The correspondence shows a tender conscience, with a humility not devoid of independence. The art products were in fact of so high a quality that the painter conferred a greater favour than any he could receive in return.

Overbeck left the hospitable roof of Cornelius in Munich at the end of August, 1831, and reached Heidelberg, there to meet with an enthusiastic reception from friends and admirers; there also, after a separation of five-and-twenty years, he saw once more, and for the last time, his elder brother from Lübeck. Close to Heidelberg, overhanging the banks of the Neckar, is Stift Neuburg, formerly a monastic establishment, but then the picturesque residence of a family in warmest bonds of friendship with the art brethren. At this lovely spot, I am told by the present owner, "Overbeck stayed several days, and a seat in the garden is still called after him 'Overbeck's Plätzchen.'" On this rustic bench the painter was wont to sit meditatively amid scenery of surpassing beauty; the quietude of nature and the converse of kindred minds were to his heart's content. Within the old mansion, on the walls and in portfolios, are the choicest examples of the artist's early and middle periods; thus Stift Neuburg in its house and grounds remains sacred to the painter's memory.*

of Moses, The Israelites gathering Manna, The Madonna and St. Joseph worshipping the Infant Jesus, Christ found in the Temple, and The Awakening of Jairus's Daughter. Of the last I have met with two other examples. The engraving, *Christ in the Temple*, illustrating this volume, is from the drawing in this collection.

* The principal drawings at Stift Neuburg have been mentioned in previous pages. I will now add from notes taken on the spot: Portrait of Cornelius by Overbeck and a companion portrait on the same paper of Overbeck by Cornelius. Pencil: 1 foot 4 inches by 1 foot 3 inches. This joint handiwork, presented to their friend on the eve of his leaving

From Heidelberg Overbeck travelled to Frankfort—a city soon to become a focus of the wide-spreading revival. Here the apostle of sacred art made the acquaintance of the poet Clemens Brentano, and fell among other friends and adorers. Philip Veit, his fellow-worker in the Casa Bartholdi and the Villa Massimo, had just been appointed Director of the Städel Institute, where he executed one of the noblest of frescoes—*The Introduction of the Arts into Germany through Christianity*. Likewise among warm adherents was Johann Passavant, a painter who in Rome had joined the brethren, a critic who made a name by the ‘Life of Raphael.’ Overbeck was here esteemed “the greatest living artist,” and some expressed “the cherished thought, the earnest desire” that the painter should be secured for Frankfort. But as this proved out of the question, the promise was gladly accepted of the master-work since famous as *The Triumph of Religion in the Arts*. Cologne next received a visit, and the Cathedral choir having advanced towards completion, the assistance of the Christian painter was naturally solicited: *The Assumption of the Virgin*, now adorning a side chapel, counts among the memorable fruits of the painter’s timely visit to his native land. This northern journey was extended as far as Düsseldorf, a sequestered town already growing illustrious for its school of religious painting. Wilhelm Schadow,

Rome for Germany, bears the following inscription: “In Remembrance of our friend C. F. Schlosser, from F. Overbeck and J. P. Cornelius. Rome, 16 March, 1812.” The latest drawing in the collection, date 1836, represents Christ bearing the Lamb: the Saviour opens His mantle and shows a flaming heart. This is one of the first signs of the painter’s ultimate tendency to exalt dogmas and legends at the expense of essential truth and beauty. Some of the chief drawings at Stift Neuburg have been published in photography by Bruckmann, Munich.

co-partner in Roman labours, had here, as Director of the Academy, gathered round him devoted scholars, and Overbeck greeted his old friend as a missionary in the common cause. After receiving on all hands respectful adulations which would have turned a vainer head, the traveller bent his steps southwards, and reached Italy by way of Strasburg and Switzerland. On reaching Rome, he writes on the 1st of December to Cornelius in characteristic tone: "You will understand with what lively joy I once more saw my beloved Rome; I therefore will not conceal the painful impression which the distracted opinions and doctrines in the Fatherland have left in my mind, but I feel rest in the persuasion that, through the dispensation of Providence, my lot has been cast in this Roman seclusion, not that I intend to lay my hands idly in my lap, but, on the contrary, I shall endeavour to work with my utmost ability, spurred on all the more by the thought that even here at a distance I shall move in your circle." Assuredly as to professional prospects the passage of the Alps had extended the artist's circuit: the Italian works which chiefly mark the painter's first period had come to an end; henceforth Overbeck's labours, though prosecuted within the Roman studio, were for the good of Germany.

Overbeck, in September, 1833, witnessed an event memorable in the history of art: he was present at the opening of Raphael's tomb in the Pantheon, and a few days after he wrote to his friend Veit at Frankfort a circumstantial account, as some relief to his overwhelming emotions. The letter is here of interest as evidence of Overbeck's unshaken allegiance to the great master; if called by others a pre-Raphaelite, he remained at heart faithful to the painter from whom indeed he borrowed

largely. Unlike certain of our English artists and critics, he never decried Raphael. He writes: "Know, then, I was present at the opening of Raphael's grave, and have looked upon the true and incomparable master. What a shudder came over me when the remains of the honoured painter were laid open, thou canst better conceive than I can describe. May this deep experience not be without good results for us: may the remembrance of the honoured one make us more worthy inheritors of his spirit!"*

Overbeck about this time, in letters to Emilie Linder, begins to express ultra views, to the prejudice of his art. He pleads that certain Biblical drawings may have for her more worth because the religious meaning dominates over the art skill. In like manner he writes apologetically concerning *The Death of St. Joseph*. The picture, he urges, embodies not so much a historic fact as an-idea, the intent being not to lead the spectator to the real, but to something beyond. The purist painter then proceeds to express his invincible reluctance to study the subject from the side of life; models he had carefully avoided, because he feared that a single glance at nature would destroy the whole conception. It is with sincere regret that I have to record so pernicious a doctrine. Surely the artist's special function must always be to find out the divine element in nature, and fatal is the day when first he calls into question the essential oneness between Nature and God. But Overbeck's peculiar phase of Catholicism marred as well as made his art. Through the Church he entered a holy, heavenly sphere, and his pictures verily stand forth as the revelation of his soul. But the sub-

* Overbeck's letter on the opening of the tomb in the Pantheon is published in Passavant's 'Life of Raphael.'

limest of doctrines sometimes prove to be utterly unpaintable, and certainly the tenets to which Overbeck gave a super-sensuous turn, in the end perplexed and clouded his art. Outraged nature took her revenge, and the sequel shows that Overbeck so diverted his vision and narrowed his pictorial range that his art fell short of the largeness of nature and humanity.

Northern Germany claimed the illustrious painter as her son, and so fitly came commissions from Cologne, Lübeck, and Hamburg. For the great Hospital in this last commercial town was painted the large oil-picture, *Christ's Agony in the Garden*. This impressive composition represents the Saviour kneeling; the head is bowed in anguish, the hands are raised in ecstasy; below, the three disciples lie asleep, and in the glory of the upper sky amid rolling clouds appears as a vision the angel bearing the cross. I paid a visit to Hamburg in order to judge of a work of which I could find but slight mention. Its characteristics are just what might have been anticipated. The drawing is studious, the expression intense, the execution feeble; in short, the technique becomes wholly subordinate to the intention. The conception has Giottesque simplicity: the shade of night brings solemnity, and the longer I stood before the canvas the more I became impressed with the quietude and fervour of the scene.*

* *Christ's Agony in the Garden* is on canvas, 7 feet wide by 11 feet high: figures size of life: without signature or date: the manner is that of the middle period: the year I believe to be between 1831 and 1835. The system of colour, though not without the depth and solemnity of the early schools of Lombardy, is that peculiar to the religious art of modern Germany: it is dull, heavy and opaque. I would quote as an interesting proof of nature-study, still maintained at

We find an epitome of Overbeck's mind and art in a lovely composition, *Lo Sposalizio*. Count Raczynski had as far back as 1819 given a general commission, and at first was proposed as a subject the *Sibyl*, for which the drawing in sepia, dated 1821, now hangs in the Count's Gallery in Berlin. The figure, pensive and poetic, resembles a mediæval Saint rather than a Sibyl. The painter afterwards found a more congenial theme in *The Marriage of the Virgin*. The treatment is wholly traditional, the style austere pre-Raphaelite; the only expletive in the way of an idea comes with attendant angels, lyres in hand. The work was not delivered till 1836, in the meanwhile the first fire had died out, and nature was thrust into the distance. The technique had not improved, the material clothing becomes subject to the mental conception, thus are eschewed *chic* of touch and surface texture. The colour is indescribable: it pertains neither to earth nor to heaven, and yet it has more of dull clay than of iridescent light. What a misfortune that the gem-like lustre of the early Italians escaped this modern disciple! A thoroughly characteristic letter accompanied the picture. Overbeck having shut himself out from the world, seeks for his creations a like seclusion. He writes to Raczynski: "As you are wishing to send my picture to the public exhibition in Berlin, I cannot refrain from expressing my anxiety. Paintings of this kind appear to me not fitted to be seen by the motley multitude usually gathered together in exhibitions. The general public are almost sure to measure wrongly works like this, for as the this pronounced period, a foreground plant and flower exquisitely drawn and affectionately painted. The picture is seen to utmost disadvantage: the cold and poverty-stricken surroundings are those usually deemed appropriate in Lutheran Germany.

eye is attracted to outward means and is engaged on technical splendours, pictures in which these qualities are held in subordination to higher aims cannot but sink into the shade. The spectator is not in the mood to honour a spiritual subject which has been thought out from a spiritual side. The place in which this picture should be seen is a chapel, or some such peaceful spot removed from disturbing surroundings.”*

I now wish to direct the reader's attention to *The Triumph of Religion in the Arts*, otherwise *The Magnificat of Art*, or *The Christian Parnassus*, or the triumph of Mariolatry. This large and elaborate composition embodied the artist's best thoughts for ten years in the prime of life, from 1831 to 1840. Accompanying the work was a written explanation, which comprises a confession of Overbeck's art faith.† The Madonna, with the Infant in her arms, sits enthroned in the upper half of the canvas, and around, in mid-heaven, are ranged prophets, evangelists, and saints. On the earth below stand some sixty painters, sculptors, and architects; the heads as far as possible are taken from authentic portraits. In the midst is a fountain, the upper waters rising into the sky, the lower falling

* The present position of *The Marriage of the Virgin* in the Racynski Gallery, Berlin, has just those “disturbing surroundings” which the painter dreaded. It is crowded among discordant works, and is hung so high that I had to ask for a ladder to examine its quality and condition. The oil pigments remain sound save some small surface cracks. The size is about 6 feet by 4 feet. The modest price paid by the munificent patron, and for which he received the artist's grateful acknowledgments, was somewhat under 100*l.* sterling. Surely Overbeck did not paint for filthy lucre.

† See account of ‘Religion glorified by the Fine Arts,’ written by the painter himself and translated by Mr. John Macray: published by Ryman, Oxford; 2nd edition, 1850.

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into two basins beneath. The painter explains his meaning as follows: "The fountain in the centre is the emblem of the well of water springing up into eternal life, thus denoting the heavenward direction of Christian Art as opposed to the idea of the ancients, who represented the stream as flowing downwards from Mount Parnassus. Every manifestation of art therefore is honoured so far only as it looks towards heaven. The fountain descends into two mirrors: the upper one reflects heaven, the lower receives earthly objects; thus is indicated the twofold character of art, which, on the one hand, in its spiritual essence comes with every good thought from above, and which, on the other, is derived from the outward forms of nature. This twofold sphere of art is signified by the position assigned to the assembled artists in relation to the two mirrors of water." Overbeck next proceeds to expound his pictorial judgments. He gives Raphael a white robe as symbolic of universal genius, "for as white light contains the seven prismatic colours, so does Raphael's art unite all the qualities we gaze on with wonder." Michelangelo sits apart on a fragment of antique sculpture, his back turned alike on the Fountain and the Madonna. I once ventured to ask Overbeck in his studio for some explanation of this harsh judgment; he calmly but firmly replied that he thought the verdict according to the evidence. Still less mercy is shown to the Venetians, and as for Correggio, he is stigmatised as utterly lost. On the other hand, Fra Angelico, the Tuscan School, Dürer, and the brothers Van Eyck receive due reverence. But it has fairly been questioned whether the majority of the sixty or more artists here immortalised would thank the painter for his pains. The

reading given to historic facts is narrow, partial, not to say perverted, and could content only such ultra critics as Rio, Montalembert, and Pugin.

The Triumph of Religion * I have known for more than a quarter of a century, and have heard much of its profundity, spiritualism, and symbolism. But no critic will assign to the picture the first rank among works of creative reason and imagination; the comparison has inevitably been instituted with Raphael's *Disputa*, in the Vatican, to which it is confessedly inferior. Historically, it finds a place sufficiently honourable by the side of Francia and Pinturicchio. Its avowed merits are considerable; its very scale and the vastness of the labour give importance; the canvas extends to a breadth and height of about fifteen feet. The composition, if not bold or masterly, is careful and thoughtful, the drawing scholastic; the heads are wrought as biographic studies, the draperies cast into balanced harmonies. The execution is steady, without show or fling; the colour, as always, is the reverse of alluring: Venetian splendours are eschewed

* The picture has been engraved by Amsler, and is also photographed. The cartoon is in the Carlsruhe Gallery, framed and hung: it measures about 12 feet wide by 14 feet high: it is in charcoal or chalk, on squares of whity-brown paper mounted on canvas. This drawing is remarkable for thoroughness in form and character; indeed, it is just what a cartoon should be. Countless preliminary studies of separate figures and draperies must have preceded it. Overbeck in a letter, 28th December, 1839, to Emilie Linder mentions three cartoons or studies. One large one being the above. A second smaller, 4 feet 8 inches square, in sepia, on canvas. This I examined October, 1880, in the National Gallery, Berlin: the execution in parts is poor. The work had been sent for sale, but was not purchased. The third sketch is described by the artist as different in proportions and composition. It is in black chalk and pencil on red paper. The painter names £100 as the price: he received £1300 for the picture.

in favour of pigments thin, dull, and crude. Yet the technique has usual soundness; the materials stand firm and unchanged. The picture has the advantage of a commanding position in the handsome new gallery in Frankfort, and, notwithstanding its defects and shortcomings, must be accounted as among the most memorable achievements of the century.

Overbeck made *The Triumph of Religion* a propaganda of his pictorial faith, and wrote his explanatory text for the special benefit of young painters. The document concludes with the following emphatic and affectionate appeal: "And now, my dear young friend and brother artist, so ardently striving to excel in the Fine Arts, I have placed a picture before you in which you may wander as in a garden. Here you see all the great masters: behold how the future lies spread before you, like the bright distance in this picture, so that you may be encouraged thereby in your noble task. Strive to approach the great masters with all the powers of your mind, but know that you can only reach their eminence by steadily keeping in view the goal which I have endeavoured in this painting to place before you. Several of the artists here assembled may serve as warnings to you: the Venetians went astray as soon as they made colouring the principal object of attraction, and so by degrees they sank in sensuality. The effeminate Correggio proceeded in this career at a more rapid rate, until he had cast aside every restraint of modesty and morality, and gave himself up to unbridled voluptuousness.* Michael

* Surely Overbeck is unjust to the masterpieces of Correggio in Parma and Dresden, including two Holy Families, *Il Giorno* and *La Notte*. He likewise must have forgotten Titian's religious

Angelo set up the antique as an object of idolatry, and Raphael was tempted to taste the forbidden fruit, and so the sin of apostasy in the fine arts became manifest. In after times, indeed, various attempts have been made to elevate the arts; but as no remedy was applied to the source of the evil, the result proved on the whole unsuccessful. This is also the reason why none of the celebrated masters of late times have been introduced into our painting.* In conclusion, you may unhesitatingly adopt as a principle that the fine arts can alone be beneficial to man when, like the wise virgins, they go out to meet the bridegroom in humility and modesty, with their lamps burning and fed with the faith and the fear of God: only as such daughters of heaven are they worthy of your love."

Ten years of the painter's later period, reaching from 1843 to 1852, were dedicated to the Life of Christ as recorded by the four Evangelists. German artists of the modern time have revived the practice of the old religious painters of composing Biblical series, and such a narrative is technically termed a "cyclus." Overbeck

pictures in Venice and Vienna, *The Assumption* and sundry Holy Families. The "young artist" has to remember that a picture is different from a homily: that art has to be valued for her own sake, that drawing, composition, light, shade and colour are indispensable elements in every art work. Overbeck shirks the stern truth that the first duty of a painter is to paint.

* It is difficult to remain tolerant of such intolerance. Why does not Overbeck declare plainly that Ary Scheffer is excluded because he was a Protestant? As spectators a place in the picture is assigned to Cornelius, Veit, and to Overbeck himself, all Roman Catholics, whilst Schnorr, as a Protestant, is deemed unworthy to appear. It is interesting to observe that Overbeck's darling son is introduced in the character of a young Englishman.

evolved three such consecutive compositions—"The Gospels" in forty cartoons, "The Sacraments" in seven, and "The Stations" in fourteen. The large drawings for "The Gospels" or "Evangelists" * I was accustomed to see from time to time while in progress within the studio; none were ever carried out, as the artist might have hoped, in oils, or as wall pictures or tapestries, but all, in common with most of his drawings, have been widely diffused by means of engraving. † Overbeck was specially qualified by his habits of mind and literary tastes and antecedents thus to write off his thoughts in outline; his drawings may be compared to "thinking aloud," and one scene after another reads as consecutive sonnets bearing on continuous themes. The events depicted as a matter of course fall into accustomed routine; they almost of necessity begin with *The Annunciation* and end with *The Ascension*. Yet Overbeck, while inspired was not enslaved by his predecessors; often are presented novel and even bold conceptions, as in *The Massacre of the Innocents* (1843) and *Barabbas released and borne in Triumph* (1849). Such designs prove an intellect neither

* The cartoons for the Gospels, originally made for an art dealer in Prague, were afterwards acquired by the late Baron Lotzbeck of Weiher, near Munich, and are now in the possession of the son, the present Baron: they are framed and protected under glass.

† See 'L'Évangile Illustré: Quarante Compositions de Frédéric Overbeck: gravées par les meilleurs Artistes de l'Allemagne:' Schulgen, Düsseldorf and Paris. Overbeck had an aversion to the heavy and mechanical schools of engraving; he objected to meaningless masses of shadow and to the multiplication of lines inexpressive of form. Accordingly these engravings from the Gospels, in common with other plates from the master, possess merits the opposites to such defects. Like the original drawings, they are chiefly dependent on outline, and even their slightness is not without the advantage of suggestiveness. Four illustrations here are facsimiles of the engravings.





servile nor sterile. Certain other compositions are marred by affectation and sentimentality, traits of morbid moods increasing with years, and which contrast strangely with the healthiness and robustness of the great old masters. Fitly have been chosen to illustrate these pages *The Naming of St. John* (1843), *Christ Healing the Sick* (1843), *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem* (1849), *The Entombment* (1844), and *The Resurrection* (1848). Two other illustrations, *Christ in the Temple* and *Christ falling under the Cross* show variations on the Gospel series. Overbeck may be compared to certain fastidious writers who mature by endless emendations and finishing touches; he loved to recur oft and again to favourite texts, changing attitudes, adding or subtracting figures, episodes, or accessories. His life-long compositions are as a peopled world of the elect and precious: many of the characters we claim as old acquaintances; the figures come, go, and return again, changed, yet without a break in personal identity. They move round a common centre; Christ is their life; they are in soul and body Christian.

These "Gospels" have taken a permanent place in the world's Christian Art. If not wholly worthy of so large and grand a theme, they yet scarcely suffer from comparison with like efforts by other artists. They have hardly less of unction and holiness than Fra Angelico's designs, while undoubtedly they display profounder science and art. That they have nothing in common with the Bible of Gustave Doré is much to their praise; on the other hand, that they lack the inventive fertility and the imaginative flight of the Bible of Julius Schnorr indicates that they fall short of universality. These Gospels, it may also be said, pertain not to the

Church militant, but to the Church triumphant; not to the world at large, but to a select company of believers. They teach the passive virtues—patience, resignation, long-suffering, and so far realise the painter's ideal of earth as the portal to heaven. Certain spheres were beyond his ken. The marriage of Cana did not for him flow with the wine of gladness; he had no fellowship with the nuptial banquet as painted by Veronese. His pencil shunned the Song of Miriam and the Dance of the Daughter of Herodias; it could not pass, like the pen of England's epic poet, with a light fantastic touch from "Il Penseroso" to "L'Allegro;" his walk was narrow as a convent cloister; his art was attuned to the sound of the vesper bell.

Overbeck's modes of study and habits of work were like himself—secluded and self-contained. His strength did not permit prolonged labour, and his mind was easily put out of tune; yet by method and strict economy of time he was able, as we have seen, to get through a very considerable amount of work. Each day had its allotted task. He rose summer and winter between five and six o'clock, and usually went to church; at seven he took a simple breakfast, then entered his studio and worked on till one. This was the hour for dinner, a frugal meal preceded by the customary grace. After a little repose, action was resumed about half-past two, and continued till four, or sometimes even to six. Then came exercise, mostly a meditative walk; in early times, before the habits of a recluse had grown confirmed, the painter enjoyed an evening's stroll with choice spirits, such as Niebuhr and Bunsen, but in later years he preferred his own communings, his thoughts turning upon art or finding diver-

sion only among the beauties of nature. Within the house he became abstracted; he wandered about lost to outward surroundings, and would brook no interruption. In the winter evenings, at least in later life, he relaxed so far as to join in some table game; but his hours were early, he supped at eight, then retired to his room for meditation, and was always in bed by ten. General family prayers were not the order of the household; the constant habit was individual devotion in private. The Pope took a fatherly care over the pious artist, and granted him privileges permitted only to the few. And Overbeck was on his part strict and zealous in all Church functions, and neglected no means of building up the Christian life. Each day in fact was so nicely apportioned between religion and art, that the morning and the evening worship blended indissolubly with the midday work.

The bodily and mental aspect of Overbeck is well known. I myself had the privilege of first seeing the painter when in the Cenci Palace, as far back as the year 1848. My journal describes a man impressive in presence, tall and attenuated in body, worn by ill-health and suffering, the face emaciated and tied round by a piece of black silk. The mind had eaten into the flesh; the features were sorrow-laden. The voice sank into whispers, the words were plaintive and sparse; noiselessly the artist glided among easels bearing pictorial forms austere as his own person, meekly he offered explanations of works which embodied his very soul, timidly sought retreat and passed as a shadow by—the emblem of an art given in answer to prayer and pertaining to two worlds.

The painter, as drawn or described by himself and

others, presents an interesting psychological study: no historic portrait reveals closer correspondence between the inner and the outer man. Cornelius delineated his friend at the age of twenty-three: the type is ascetic and æsthetic after the pre-Raphaelite pattern affected by the Nazarites. Führich, one of the fraternity, describes his first impressions: on entering the studio he beheld a tall, spare figure, noble in head, the hair flowing over smooth temples to the shoulders, the forehead reflective, the calm eye "soul-full," the whole aspect that of "inner living." It is added, "at once I felt a soul fulfilment." Yet another artist-disciple, Edwin Speckter,* also leaves a graphic record penned in 1831 as follows: "A melancholy and heart-moving impression has Overbeck made upon me: I beheld a tall, spare man, with thin, light hair, shadowed by a black cap, whose eyes looked forth sadly, as with an expression of unutterable suffering. His mouth contracted at each word into a forced yet sweet smile. He looked just as a timid prisoner, who dreads in every corner to see a spy. Yet in all his speech and ways appeared wondrous humility, modesty, and kindly geniality, which, however, did not attract, but in a strange manner repelled. I hardly dared to open my mouth, and only spoke softly and by way of inquiry. Freely to impart my mind as with others was impossible. My breast felt oppressed, and truly I scarcely knew what to say when he unceasingly begged pardon that he should dare to show his works: he called them 'insignificant,'

* See 'Briefe eines deutschen Künstlers aus Italien, aus den nachgelassenen Papieren von Edwin Speckter.' Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1846. Also see 'Bunte Blätter, von A. W. Ambros.' Leipzig: Leuckart, 1872.

‘nothing,’ esteemed himself fortunate that people should choose to give commissions to so unworthy an individual, only he pitied the patrons that they had not fallen on a more capable man. And then when I asked if I might come again, he replied, ‘Good heavens! if I would give myself the trouble, he should be only too delighted.’ I could almost have laughed, but with tears in my eyes.”





CHAPTER IV.

LATE WORKS—CONCLUSION—THE PAINTER AND HIS ART.

OVERBECK, as we have seen, deliberately laid out his life for tranquillity; but not sheltered, as Fra Angelico, in a cloister, his serene mind was at times clouded by trouble. First came the death of his son, then he lost a brother, and afterwards was bereaved of his wife. All accounts tell that the darling son, Alfons Maria, inherited the rare gifts of the father, and unhappily also was a sharer in like bodily frailty. He had been reared with tenderest solicitude, in the hope that he might carry on the good work. The profession chosen was that of architecture, an art which the Christian painter felt to be of a "mystic nature," being something "musical," and "the visible emblem of religious enthusiasm." But the bright promise was soon darkened: the youth died in the autumn of 1840, at the early age of eighteen. The father in overwhelming sorrow recounts, in a letter to Emilie Linder, how he had watched over the sick bed, and had snatched up a pencil by the quarter of an hour to assuage his grief. The boy was dutiful, and filled with filial love—he was so good that the people called him a saint. The stricken parent turned to art as "a crutch to support his lameness, and as a solace to his tears."



CHRIST FALLING
(From a Drawing in the)



UNDER THE CROSS.

ie Dresden Print Room.)

The picture of *The Entombment*, or rather *The Pietà*, in Lübeck, tells of the mind's heavy burden. In 1837 an association had been formed, and money subscribed among friends and admirers, who desired that the native city should possess some work worthy of the painter's renown. In 1842, on the completion of the first sketch and the cartoon, a letter arrived in Lübeck, saying that the grief through which the artist had passed was thrown into a composition that expressed the uttermost anguish of the soul. And again, in 1846, on the completion of the work, the Christian man writes, praying that this "lamentation over the death of the Son of God may arouse in the spectator true faith and repentance. May this painting, begun in tears for my own and only son, and finished in grief for the loss of my dear brother, draw tears from the eyes of Him who shed not only tears, but blood, in order that His death might be our life. Such aim have I always in my art, without which it would seem idle, indeed blasphemous."

The Pietà * was exhibited in Rome, and friendly

* See 'Lübeckische Blätter,' from 1839 to 1869, for sundry notices concerning this picture and other works. The *Pietà* is in oil on canvas, 10 feet wide and nearly as high; the top is arched; it is photographed. The pigments are in usual sound condition. A small picture accompanied this *Pietà*. It had been intended as a present to the brother, Judge Christian Gerhard Overbeck, but his death, in 1846, preventing the fulfilment of the purpose, it was sent to Lübeck as a gift to his son, the artist's nephew, Doctor and Senator Christian Theodore Overbeck, who died 1880. The representatives in Lübeck of this nephew are said to be in possession of sundry memorials of the illustrious uncle. Here in Lübeck I may mention a *Madonna and Child*, a circular composition 3 feet 2 inches in diameter, with the painter's monogram and the date 1853. The picture is a gem, exquisite for purity, tenderness, and beauty. Another *Madonna and Child* is in the Thorwaldsen Museum, Copenhagen.

criticisms were followed by final touches, with the filial intent to make a worthy offering to the parental city. In March, 1846, Overbeck announces, in the most modest terms, that the labour of love had at length been dispatched to Lübeck, and, much to his joy, a quiet side chapel of the choir of the Marien Kirche was chosen for its resting-place. The impression on entering this secluded spot, shut in by a locked gate, is almost startling; the eye gazes, as it were, on the actual scene: the figures are life-size; the pictorial style is, perhaps, all the more persuasive because it belongs to a remote time—nothing modern breaks the spell of sacred associations. The spectator is transported to a sphere super-mundane, and altogether religious. The dead Christ, well modelled and a fine piece of flesh painting, lies stretched on the ground in a white winding-sheet, and, as sometimes with the old painters, the body seems not dead but sleeping, as if expectant of resurrection. The composition is strictly traditional, indeed the *Pietà* of Perugino in the Pitti Palace has been implicitly followed: around are the holy women weeping, with disciples and Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathæa. Every head, hand, and drapery, are thoroughly studied. Dark rocks, lofty cypresses, and distant hills, make up a landscape which adds solemnity and depth of colour. Within a few minutes' walk of the Marien Kirche and this *Pietà* still remains Memling's masterpiece, which, as already related, had deeply impressed the youthful painter while yet in the Lübeck home, but allegiance had been long, we know, transferred from old German to Italian art, and accordingly the style adopted recalls well-remembered compositions by Francia, Fra Bartolommeo, and Perugino. Not a single new motive

intrudes; in fact, Overbeck no more desired a new art than a new religion; for him the old remained unchangeably true,—sacred characters were handed down immutably as by apostolic succession; he would rearrange an attitude, but feared to lose personal identity; he desired that this *Pietà* should awaken such holy associations as environ old pictures.

Overbeck received a commission from a Yorkshire squire, Mr. Rhodes, to paint an altar-piece for the Protestant church of St. Thomas, in Leeds, recently built from the design of Mr. Butterfield. Naturally the Incredulity of the Apostle was chosen as the subject, and the picture * reached completion in 1851. The composition is in no way out of keeping with the Anglican Church; it is without taint of Romanism; but we are told by Ernst Förster, the Munich critic,† that “people were not well pleased with the work,” at all events it never reached its destined place. Mr. Rhodes had brought the picture to England from Overbeck’s studio, and being for disposal, it was offered to Mr. Beresford Hope, who gladly became the owner, at the price of 300*l.*, the modest sum asked by the artist. The scene is thrown upon canvas with the painter’s habitual simplicity, brevity, and breadth. Christ in commanding, yet benignant, attitude, with arm uplifted, utters the words: “Reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing.” The Apostle reverently approaches. Beyond stretches a distant land-

* *The Incredulity of St. Thomas* is 10 feet high by 5 feet wide. It bears the painter’s monogram and the date 1851. The figures are life-size. The picture is in perfect preservation. The pigments, as usual, lie thin, showing through the rough tissues of the Roman canvas.

† See ‘*Geschichte der neuen Deutschen Kunst*, von Ernst Förster.’ Leipzig, Weigel, 1863.

scape, with a mountain-height that might be mistaken for the crested summit of Soracte. The lines of composition flow symmetrically, the sentiment has quiet dignity, with that sense of the divine presence which seldom fails the painter. The picture hangs in the drawing-room of Mr. Hope's town-house, and, though painted for a church, conforms to domestic uses, not being "too bright or good for human nature's daily food." The personation of the Saviour when once seen will not be forgotten; the figure, indeed, was cherished by the artist, for the motive with slight variation is repeated in *The Vocation of the Apostles James and John* (see Illustration), and again in *The Sacrament of Marriage*. Overbeck had none of the modern unrest which seeks novelty for its own sake; as a Christian artist, his growth was that of grace; and, if tested here and elsewhere by the worthiness of his conception of the God-Man, no painter attained a more heavenly ideal. It is hard to realise on earth a more perfect divinity than seen in the design *Feed my Sheep*. *The Incredulity of St. Thomas* has been exhibited in England twice; first in 1853, in the Royal Academy, where, I remember, it was honoured with a conspicuous place in the large room; afterwards, in 1857, it was seen in the Manchester Art Treasures. As far as I know, it is the only large and important work of the master submitted to the English public.

Overbeck, thirteen years after the death of his son, was in 1853 bereft of his wife, who had been his companion and caretaker for more than thirty years. She died suddenly, yet, as her husband thankfully records, with all the consolations the soul could desire. She had in the morning been to church and taken the sacrament; she

was then seized with difficulty of breathing, but, on reaching home, revived, and raised her voice to the praise and glory of God; after, she grew worse, desired to see the priest, received extreme unction, and so died.

The good painter, when the help-mate of his life was taken away, felt utterly desolate and disabled. He had never been accustomed to look after the house; some thirty poor families are said to have been dependent on his bounty; but as for himself he took little thought, and all he desired was to be saved from mundane cares. In Rome there happened to be a certain family of Hoffmanns, who, like the painter, had forsaken Protestantism for Catholicism. They were endowed with the worldly faculties in which the Christian artist was wanting, and so a close relationship had conveniently grown up. Overbeck, on the death of his wife, being absolutely incapable of getting on alone, arranged to live with this family; moreover, he adopted Madame Hoffmann, a lady of forty, as his daughter, and the adoption included the husband and the children. They seem to have made him comfortable, and letters exist which give expression to his gratitude. They, on their side, reaped their reward, inasmuch as on the death of the good artist they came into the possession of the contents of his studio, his papers, and correspondence, moneys, and all other properties. After the aforesaid family arrangement, the blood relations found little favour, and all who bore the name of Overbeck were cut off without a shilling.

Earthly trouble did but turn the painter's gaze heavenwards, and his art, which in time of trial came as consolation, grew all the more spiritual as it passed through waters of affliction. Few painters, even in the good old

days, obtained so sympathetic a public. Belief in a mission begat like faith in others, and so solicitations came for drawings and pictures far in excess of available time and strength. Certain commissions could not be entertained, secular subjects had been long eschewed, religion and the Church were alone accounted worthy of service. Therefore, in genial mood, was the great picture for Cologne Cathedral undertaken and carried out. The work occupied no less than nine years; the cartoon was already in course of preparation in 1846, and the picture reached completion in 1855. But, as with other engagements, the negotiations and preliminary correspondence extended over a longer period. Thus, as far back as 23rd August, 1829, Overbeck, while working on the Assisi fresco, writes from Santa Maria degli Angeli to his friend Mosler, stating that the Düsseldorf Kunst-Verein wish for some picture; but prior engagements stand in the way: he foresees that on the return to Rome he will find his studio crowded with works begun, but still unfinished, besides sketches of all sorts and sizes for pictures not even commenced. He therefore asks for delay, and ends with apologies for not writing more on the parental plea that "though it is Sunday, I have long given my promise to my boy Alfons, whose tenth birthday is to-day, that he shall have a ride on a donkey, and I am all the more obliged to keep my word because my fresco work here compels me for the moment to neglect him. We are all, thank God, very well, and enjoy a thousand blessings in this abode of Paradise." Three months later he writes under mistaken impressions as to the character of the commission; he wishes to know the architectural style

of the church, and hopes it may be Gothic; he desires accurate measurements, because the picture must appear to belong to its destined place, and then ends in the following characteristic terms: "I repeat once more that the commission fills me with utmost pleasure, but to you I must confide my great anxiety, that I fear this picture is destined for a Protestant church, as I hear it is to be for some newly-built church. Should this, indeed, be the case, then pray try to give the whole thing another direction, as such a commission would not suit me at all, and to refuse it would be very disagreeable to me."

Overbeck's visit to Cologne, in 1831, naturally led to further conferences concerning the picture for the Cathedral. The proposal, at first, was that a triptych on a gold ground, in a Gothic frame, should be painted for the high altar. Drawings were prepared, the general scheme was approved by Cornelius, and the Archbishop gave his assent. But objections having been raised on historic or archæologic grounds, the pictorial reredos was abandoned in favour of the present stone altar table. The artist felt deeply disappointed, and craved the prayers of his friend Steinle, who was engaged on the decoration of the choir. Fortunately, the services of Overbeck were only transferred from the high altar to the Madonna chapel, renovated to receive *The Assumption* commissioned to be painted. The cartoon was prepared and approved, and while engaged on the work the artist expressed himself supremely happy; he had no higher ambition than to be found worthy of a place in the great Cathedral.

*The Assumption of the Madonna** is suited to its surround-

* *The Assumption of the Virgin* is in oil on canvas; height about 18 feet, width 9 feet. Figures nearly life-size. The scale is rather

ings; it is in keeping with the Gothic structure and decorations, and in companionship with old triptychs and other works which carry the mind back to remote ages. The composition stands forth as a vision of the imagination; from the darkness of the grave into the light of the upper sky rises the Queen of Heaven, borne upwards on angels' wings; midway sustained by clouds are the adoring host, comprising Adam, Eve, Abraham, and King David; on the ground below are seen, in miniature, the disciples around the empty tomb. The whole conception is in perfect accord with the rites and ceremonies of the Church; while looking at the picture and listening to the voices in the choir, the harmonies between form and sound seem fitly attuned.

Overbeck, on the completion of the Cologne picture, revisited Germany for the second and last time. On the 20th July, 1855, he left Rome, proceeded to Florence, thence by way of Switzerland reached Frankfort, and extended his journey as far as Düsseldorf. In Cologne he stayed some weeks, and a festival, with usual laudatory speeches, was given in his honour. I happened to encounter the painter during his sojourn; I could hardly believe my eyes when I discovered the venerable artist gazing with accustomed placidity at Rubens's brutal representation of *The Crucifixion of St. Peter*, head downwards. With reverence I approached the great master,

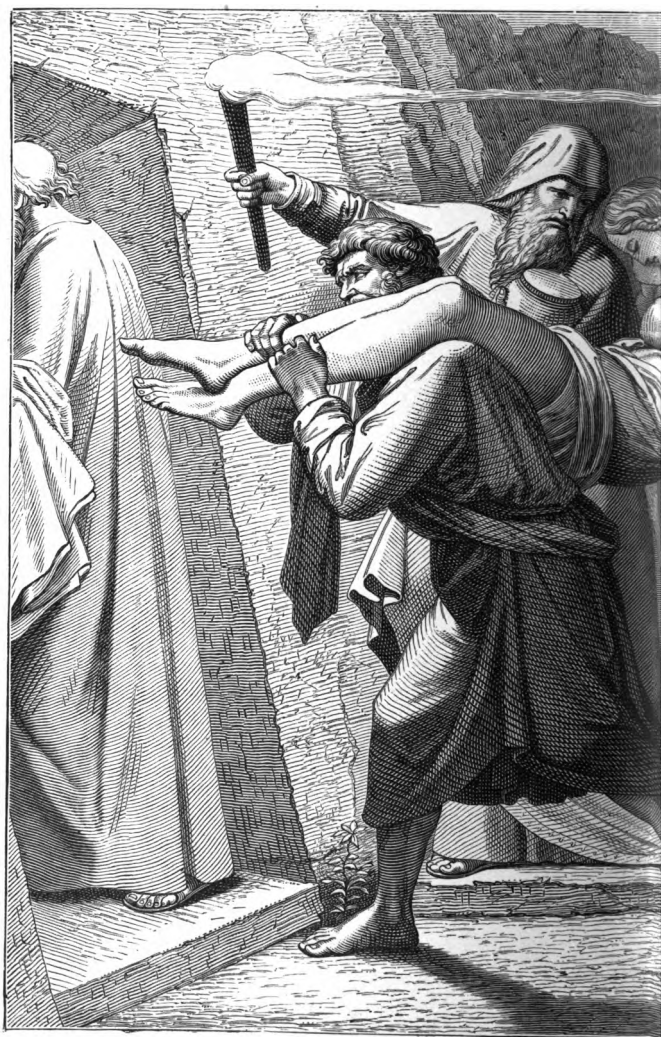
small for the magnitude of the architectural surroundings. The tone is that of an old picture, low and solemn. No positive colours are admitted. The pigments remain intact, without crack, blister, or change of colour. The picture was the joint gift of the Düsseldorf Kunst-Verein and the Cologne Cathedral Chapter. The price paid was equal to about £1000 sterling. The cartoon was exhibited in 1876 in the National Gallery, Berlin.

and received a kindly shake of the hand. Overbeck on the return-journey passed a quiet month at Mayence; he also once more saw his old friends at Stift Neuburg, near Heidelberg. In Frankfort many sympathetic hours were spent with his attached companion Steinle, whose elevated works proved a renewed delight, and whose happy family circle recalled his own joys and losses. The town of Spire also received a visit, the inducement being Schraudolph's extensive frescoes, then in progress within the Cathedral. Posterity has reason to lament that these important works were not entrusted to the chief of Christian painters. Some further weeks passed pleasantly among congenial minds in Munich, but friends were grieved to mark growing infirmities. Overbeck had reached the age of sixty-six, and Emilie Linder writes sorrowfully, that he was the only person over whose death she could rejoice, because all pertaining to the body had become a painful burden. Even the affectionate demonstrations of his countrymen were too much for him, and so gladly he turned his steps homewards. Yet not without lingering regrets did he journey southwards, and on reaching the summit of the Brenner he writes: "I turned round once more and gave, through the streams flowing northwards, a last greeting to my German land." After four months' absence, home comforts brought rest to his troubled mind.

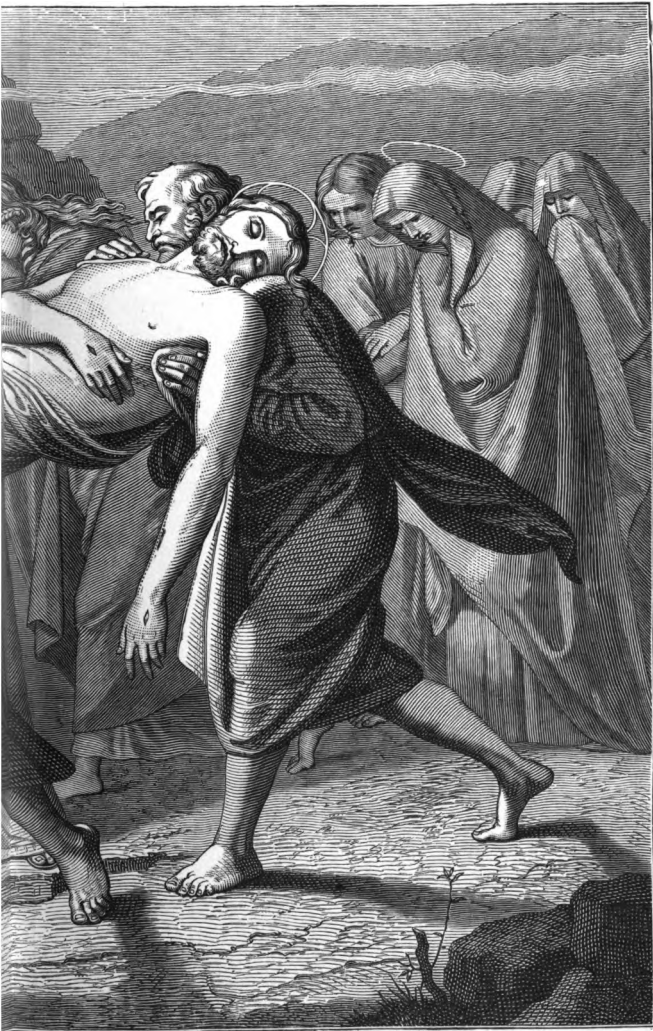
Overbeck, after the death of his wife in 1853, left the Cenci Palace and went to dwell in the more quiet region of the Esquiline Hill, near the church of Santa Maria Maggiore. Later on he removed to the house in which he died, belonging to a convent, in the Via Porta Pia on the Quirinal Hill, near to the little church of San

Bernardo, where he worshipped and lies buried. I remember the sequestered dwelling on the Esquiline, lying away from the road in one of those Italian wildernesses called a garden or a vineyard. The surroundings were inspiring; the eye wandered among churches and ruins, and beyond stretched the Roman Campagna, spanned by aqueducts and bounded by the Alban Hills, with Rocca di Papa, the painter's country retreat. The studio, which on Sundays continued to be crowded with strangers from all countries, had little in common with the ordinary run of painting rooms. Showy sketches, picturesque costumes, gay carpets and draperies, which commonly make a fashionable lounge, were wholly wanting. Like the studio of Steinle in Frankfort, all was in keeping with an art not dependent on outward materials, but reliant on inward thought. Around were ranged compositions embodying ideas, cartoons and drawings in no way decorative, but simple and austere studies of form in light and shade, or slightly tinted. At this period were thus evolved the pictorial series of the *Via Crucis* and *The Seven Sacraments*. Turning from these creations to the painter himself, the visitor might be tempted to indulge in psychological speculations touching the processes whereby the spirit of the man passed into objective shape. More and more the old and solitary master withdrew his affections from earthly concerns, he approached the close of life as the sun which sets to rise on a new day, and his art breathed the atmosphere of those pure regions where his beloved ones were at rest.

In the summer time was usually sought some country abode, not for remission of labour, but for refreshment through change of scene amid the beauties of nature. Over-



THE ENTOM



TOMBMENT.

beck, in 1856, was full of work, and in the autumn he journeyed to Perugia, and took as his travelling companions the small drawings of the *Via Crucis*. There, in the cradle of Umbrian art, in the presence of Perugino and Raphael, he carried out the scenes of *The Passion*. In the hill country of Perugia his thoughts turned to the hills round about Jerusalem, olive gardens spoke of the Garden of Gethsemane, a land lovely, yet sad, told of Him who trod the *Via Dolorosa*. The painter divided the day between the practice of his art, Church functions, and social intercourse; he revisited the scenes of his labours at Assisi, and rejoiced the German Sisterhood of St. Francis by a visit. The next year the picturesque district of Ariccia was chosen for summer sojourn, with the advantage of Cornelius within the distance of a walk. The following autumn the two old friends revisited the spot. Here the water-colour drawings of the *Via Crucis*, or *The Stations*, were with earnest solicitude brought to completion.

The Stations in "the history of our Lord" have been accustomed to comprise Christ's last sufferings, and in their symbolic meaning "represent the way to Calvary through which the believer is typically supposed to enter into the inner and holier part of the Church." Such compositions are almost indispensable to every Roman Catholic place of worship, however humble; therefore Overbeck, desiring that his art should at all seasons furnish aids to devotion, designed these fourteen stations on the *Via Dolorosa*. According to precedent, the series begins with *Jesus Condemned*, and ends with *The Entombment*. The compositions were elaborated in two forms, the one as cartoons, the other as water-colour drawings.* The

* The cartoons of the *Via Crucis* were, in September 1880, in the

treatment is, of course, traditional, and the general style does but suggest the line of criticism with which the reader must by this time be familiar; more than ever we here encounter sermons for the edification of the faithful rather than works appealing to the artist. The notes which a few years since I made before the drawings in the Vatican read somewhat severe, yet I ought hardly to withhold the impressions left on the mind. Utmost devotion and sincerity will be taken for granted, but I found that the excessive striving after religious feeling degenerated into morbid affectation and spiritual spasm, that sentiment passed into sentimentality, and that simplicity scarcely escaped childishness. Throughout became painfully apparent the lack of physical sinew and dramatic force; the characters, not being modelled on the life, wanted truth to nature; they were afflicted with a bodily frailty and mental infirmity wholly unequal to the tragic situation. These shortcomings in works of noblest motive may be ascribed to two causes: first, advancing age, with increasing loss of power; secondly, the confirmed habit of slighting art and ignoring nature in order to magnify some favourite dogma. Thus the divine painter in late years missed his aim and marred his work.

These reflections receive confirmation in *The Seven*

Villa Germania, near Biebrich. They are in chalk or charcoal in outline on grey ground, tinted with sepia. Height, 1 foot 9 inches; breadth, 1 foot 5 inches. The water-colour drawings of the same series were, in January, 1878, in the Camera di Udienza of the Vatican. Height, 2 feet 6 inches; width, 1 foot 8 inches; mounted on white, and massively framed. The walls and accessories of the Pope's apartment are of a crude colour and in bad taste. The feeble execution of these cartoons and water-colour drawings betrays advancing age and declining power.

Sacraments, compositions which are triumphs of faith at the expense of art. The painter, however, in fairness, must be allowed to speak for himself. "I must," he writes, "first set forth what my conception of art is. Art to me is as the harp of David, whereupon I would desire that Psalms should at all times be sounded to the praise of the Lord. For when earth and sea and everything that therein is, when Heaven and all the powers of Heaven unite in extolling their Creator, how can man fail to join with every faculty and gift his Maker has endowed him with in this universal hymn of thanksgiving? And especially how can one of the noblest attributes he possesses—the creative talent revealed in art—fail to acknowledge that its highest glory and noblest end consist in offering in art's own peculiar language Psalms and Songs of Praise to the Lord? So precisely as Psalms of Praise would I wish to be accepted my seven representations of the Sacraments, which, as so many fountains of grace, the Church causes abundantly and ceaselessly to flow. These mercies of God are the subjects of my seven pictures. As regards their style and execution, they may be compared to tapestries after the manner of the Arazzi of Raphael, such as it is customary to display in Italy on feast days for the adornment of churches, and serving for the instruction of the people in a language all can understand. Similar tapestries might, in a more favourable time than the present, have been wrought from these representations, but they appear now only as designs preparatory to their possible completion some day in fresco or tempera." *

* The cartoons of *The Seven Sacraments*, after a labour of some eight years, were finished in 1861, and received high encomiums when

Biblical history received ample exposition in numerous accessory compositions. Each of *The Seven Sacraments* was surrounded by a predella, a frieze, and two side borders. Some of these long spaces dilated into several themes, and thus the total number of subsidiary subjects falls little short of forty. The foliated and floral ornament in style is not Raphaelesque, but more allied to early Gothic; the manner is graceful but feeble. The scheme embodies types in the Old Testament with their fulfilment in the New; both conjoined are brought to bear on the teachings of the Church concerning the Sacraments. Some of the analogies may appear, at least to outsiders, rather fanciful and far-fetched. Yet, the mystic meanings thrown around the singularly lovely composition of *Matrimony* satisfy at least the poetic sense. The artist explains how in the frieze is seen the union of Christ with the Church—the heavenly architype of marriage—celebrated by a choir of angels. The predella presents exhibited in Brussels. They remained with Overbeck at the time of his death, together with many other artistic properties, the accumulation of a life. Some of these treasures have been sold by the family who entered into possession. The cartoons were offered for sale, but are still without a purchaser. Small tempera drawings of *The Seven Sacraments* were bought for the National Gallery, Berlin, in 1878. They are on canvas: measurement, 1 foot 8 inches by 1 foot 3 inches. These reductions were entrusted to scholars; the execution is poor; the master is responsible chiefly for revision. The pigments used vary; some are in warm sepia, others in cooler tones, and one, *Penance*, is fully coloured. The results technically are far from satisfactory. These *Sacraments*, including the predellas, friezes, and side borders, have been photographed in large and smaller sizes by Albert, Munich, and from the photographs August Gaber executed woodcuts, published with explanatory text penned by Overbeck. This text was also published as a separate pamphlet: Dresden, August Gaber; London, Dulau and Co. The hope above expressed that the cartoons might be further carried out was never realised.

a symbol from the Old Testament in Tobias, who, under divine guidance, obtains a companion for life. One side-border exemplifies the first institution of matrimony in Paradise; angels above, in embrace, are scattering flowers. On the opposite side an angel showers down thorns, and on the ground beneath lies the dead Saviour, signifying that marriage through suffering obtains its consecration. The painter ends with the closing prayer that "these seven Psalms which I have sounded on my harp may exhibit the teaching of the Church in its beauty and sublimity, and thus do honour to God, to whom alone are due glory and praise in time and in eternity. Amen."

Neither *The Seven Sacraments* as works of art, nor the printed notes thereto as treatises in theology, have been accepted by the world favourably. Even within the Roman Catholic Church they are deemed rather ultra; unfortunately the painter could not see when and where his art became an outrage on the common sense of mankind. His treatment of *Holy Communion* in these *Sacraments*, as well as in sundry other designs, is an instance of the way in which he pushed full far his sacerdotalism. He habitually departs from the treatment sanctioned by the great masters, from Giotto to Leonardo da Vinci; in place of a long table whereat all are seated is a small altar, before which the Apostles kneel; in lieu of a supper, the cloth is laid with only a plate and chalice, and instead of the breaking of bread among the disciples, Christ stands apart elevating a wafer. Now, all religious controversy aside, most minds will feel that, by thus substituting a fiction for a recorded fact, the subject is spoilt in point of art. And herein I cannot but recall a saying of Coleridge to the effect that he who begins

by loving his Creed more than Christianity will end by loving his Church more than truth.”*

Between the Christian artist and the head of the Church grew, as might be expected, a bond of mutual respect and attachment. Overbeck and Pius IX. had much in common; they were as brothers in affliction; the age was unbelieving; they had fallen upon evil days; and each was sustained alike by unshaken faith in the Church. Concerning *The Stations*, the drawings of which are in the private rooms of the Vatican, the Pope showed the liveliest interest, and wrote a letter to the artist full of apostolic benedictions. He had also evinced his friendly regard by giving sittings for his portrait. Afterwards, in 1857, came the commission to paint, for the Quirinal Palace, the large tempera picture representing Christ miraculously escaping from the Jews, who, according to the Gospel of St. Luke, had “thrust him out of the city, and had led him to the brow of the hill whereon the city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.” This astounding composition is the one step from the sublime to the ridiculous; it represents Christ with the right foot on the edge of a precipice, the left in the air on the heads of small angels: it was intended to symbolise the Pope’s escape from Rome, and his subsequent return to the city; and further it expressly signified the triumph

* I was informed, in October, 1881, by August Gaber, that the wood engravings made by him of *The Seven Sacraments* had proved a financial failure, and that he had in the undertaking lost his all. The Bible of Schnorr, also rendered on wood by him, had, on the contrary succeeded. The reason assigned why the public did not care for *The Seven Sacraments* was, that the treatment is too strongly Catholic; and this can hardly be a prejudiced judgment, because it was pronounced by Herr Gaber, himself a Catholic.

of the spiritual over the temporal power.* While the large and important work was in progress, Pius IX. paid a visit to the painter in his studio, an event to the honour of modern art comparable to the old stories touching Francis I. with Leonardo da Vinci and Philip IV. in the painting-room of Velazquez. This abortive miracle on canvas left on my mind, when seen in the studio, a very painful impression, and sound critics—Zahn and others—pronounce the subject as unpaintable, and the work most unfortunate. Overbeck had not the power possessed by the old masters of carrying the imagination into the age of miracle.

I have been at some pains to make the account here given of the painter's works exhaustive. My opportunities of observation have been favourable, and yet, especially as no complete biography of the artist has hitherto been published, some minor works may have escaped my notice. Here, in conclusion, may fitly come a few additions. *The Raising of Lazarus*, the exquisite drawing of which, now in the Düsseldorf Academy, has

* The picture is in tempera on canvas, and was put up on the ceiling of Pio Nono's sitting room in the Quirinal Palace. But when the King of Italy took possession, a new canvas with cupids and putti was stretched over it, and the Pope's sitting room is now turned into Prince Humbert's bedroom. This brutality might almost justify the good painter in his belief that Satan is now let loose upon earth. Yet the plea has not without reason been urged that the picture is a deliberate attack on the King's temporal power. The original cartoon was, in 1876, exhibited in the National Gallery, Berlin, and the same subject the artist repeated in an oil picture (10 feet by 8 feet), now in the Antwerp Museum. Overbeck had been made a "Membre effectif" of the Antwerp Academy in 1863, and the commission for this *replica* followed thereon. I am told on authority that in Antwerp "the work is considered very mediocre."

already received notice, was, in 1822, painted in oils. *The Death of St. Joseph*, before mentioned, was, in 1838, reproduced for the private chapel of the newly created Bishop of Algiers. Also worthy of mention are cartoons of *The Twelve Apostles* and of *The Four Evangelists*, for the Torlonia chapel at Castel Gondolfo; a design, *Christ teaching the Lord's Prayer*, for a window in the church of St. Katherine, Hamburg; sketches, including *The Coronation of the Virgin*, for a cathedral in Mexico; likewise drawings of the *Virtues*, also *Moses and the Daughters of Jethro*, the last engraved by Gruner, and then in England, belonging to Lord Hatfield. Also *The Vocation of St. John and St. James*, a pencil drawing in the possession of Baron Lotzbeck, Schloss Weiher, near Munich. This beautiful design has been chosen as one of the illustrations to this volume. Few masters have been so largely engraved as Overbeck; scarcely a picture or drawing of import exists that has not become thus widely diffused. By the artist's own hand are reproduced, on copper, *St. Philip Neri*, and a *Pilgrim*. In France were published the "Book of Hours," and "The Imitation of Christ," severally illustrated from designs by Overbeck. A pictorial art, chiefly reliant on form, and expressly intended for the teaching and saving of man, was fitly thus multiplied and disseminated.

Numerous portraits of Overbeck, by himself and friends, give a retrospective view of his character. Probably the earliest is a pencil drawing in the Vienna Academy by the Viennese painter, Johann Scheffer von Leonhardshoff; the date must be prior to 1810, and the age somewhere about twenty. The head is remarkable, almost abnormal; the outlook on the world is inquiring, querulous, and combative; the penetrative eyes seem in search after





RECTION.

undiscovered truth; the pursed-up mouth is prepared for protest; the attenuated nose and contracted nostril betray austerity and acerbity; the whole aspect is that of nervous irritability. The spirit is still in unrest, having sought in vain for the ideal; and unsatisfied yearnings already settle into moody sentiment and melancholy. In these traits are clearly legible the painful perplexities and the severe conflicts of the painter's first period. And like mental states and bodily conditions are carried into the pencil likeness already mentioned, taken in Rome by Cornelius some three years later: for the moment the mind seems masked by a phlegmatic mass of German clay; whatever might be light-giving in the inward man appears clouded. This, as we have seen, was for the young painter a time of doubt and difficulty, and the face remains as yet unilluminated. The next known portraits come at a long interval, and show marked changes, which tell of deep and not wholly blissful experiences. In 1837, Carl Küchler, who made a series of portraits of German painters living in Rome, took and engraved the likeness of Overbeck at the age of forty-eight. The head is most striking and impressive; the coronal regions, the reputed abode of the moral and religious faculties, rise in full development; the frontal lobes of the intellect, with the adjacent territories of the imagination, bespeak the philosopher and the poet, while the scant circuit of the posterior organs gives slight sign of animal passion. The mien is that of a mediæval saint—austere, devout; the eyes steadfastly gaze as on hidden mysteries, yet shine with spiritual radiance; the brow, temple, and cheek are those of the child, yet thinker; all the features have settled into meditative repose, gently

shaded by melancholy. Overbeck, at this time in close converse with Heaven, had given himself unreservedly to Christian Art; hence this supremely ideal head. The portrait, contributed to the autograph collection of artists' heads in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, pleased neither the painter nor any one else, yet it was carried out on the favourite doctrine of uniting the inward with the outward man. The style is hard and dry, the character that of starved asceticism; the expression is Jesuitical, and actual traits are so exaggerated as barely to escape caricature. The artist was painted by Carl Hoffmann, also, it is said, by Genelli and Ernst Deger. The portraits in late life, whilst preserving personal identity, betray somewhat painfully the inroads of age and ill health. Rudolf Lehmann made a faithful study in 1853; Adolf Grass, an inmate in the house, painted in oils a portrait in 1865; and Professor Bendemann, in 1867, prevailed upon the diffident old man to give a sitting. Two years later death entered the house, and Friedrich Geselschap, a friend and artist from Düsseldorf, came a few hours after the eyes were closed, and made a full-size chalk drawing of the head as it peacefully lay on the pillow. This faithful transcript, now on the table before me, scarcely sustains the statement of some writers, that the countenance after death assumed a glorified aspect; but, whether living or dying, peace, though not void of pain, is the pervading expression.

Overbeck, after the goodly habit of the old masters, was fond of introducing himself as a spectator in the sacred scenes he depicted, and thus the above list of portraits is considerably extended. The painter appears personally in *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem*; also, in com-

pany with his friends Cornelius and Veit, he joins the general assembly of artists in *The Triumph of Religion*. Again, in *The Gospels* the devout painter is present at the Crucifixion, bent on his knees, the hands clasped, his eyes gazing on Christ upon the Cross. Overbeck was not thus the egotist or a man craving for glory, but merely the humblest of servants seeking some inconspicuous place among the followers of Christ, and desiring to be numbered with God's elect.

I have endeavoured, though perhaps very imperfectly, to lay before the reader a picture of Overbeck as the artist and the man, and now little remains save a few general conclusions. I have anxiously tried to ascertain the painter's mode of work, and the successive steps by which he matured his compositions. This inquiry has proved all the more difficult, because drawings in their early stages were persistently kept out of view. The artist had two studios, the one strictly private for quiet incubation apart; the other public, wherein only finished products were shown. The question is, how consummate designs such as *The Gospels* were elaborated. I find that Overbeck first revolved a subject in his thoughts until he had formed a distinct mental conception; this inward vision he would sometimes for months carry about with him, within the house and in his walks abroad. At last, when it had taken shape, he sketched out the idea with lead pencil on a small piece of paper; and, just in proportion as the first process had been tentative and slow, so was the final act swift and certain. In these supreme moments he had the power of throwing off his innermost thoughts without aids from the outer world: the lines flowed from his pencil rapidly when he had made

up his mind what to do, and the forms once set down were seldom changed. The facility increased rather than lessened with years; thus we read, "At the age of seventy-two I create with undiminished freshness and pleasure." As soon as the first small sketch was complete, the usual method was followed of squaring out the surface with lines, in order to reproduce in charcoal, chalk, or sepia the design on the full scale required—often the size of life. For the important figures, for the heads, hands, and draperies, studies from the life were diligently made. Such drawings and cartoons have been and are greatly prized by connoisseurs; for example, *The Seven Years of Famine* was acquired by Sir Thomas Lawrence for his collection. The reader will understand how difficult it was for the painter to find assistants who could help in this directly personal work, in this concentration of individual thought; hence the prolonged time needed, extending, as we have seen, to periods of five or ten years. Separate studies of colour were also sometimes, if not always, made. The ultimate stage of painting upon canvas or wall was comparatively a mechanical process.

Furthermore, we have to consider and make allowance for certain technical notions of Overbeck and his school. The opinion upheld was that the idea or mental conception constituted the chief value of any art work, that outline or form was the direct language or vehicle of such idea, and that colour, light, shade, surface-texture, or realism, were subordinate, if not derogatory, elements. Thus it is that the works of the master cannot be judged by ordinary standards: hence likewise the drawings and cartoons are superior to the pictures.

Especially does Overbeck's colour stand in need of ex-

planation or apology. In the first place we have to take into account how far the artist was bound to tradition; we have, for instance, to bear in mind that in painting *The Assumption*, he was enjoined by the Church to clothe the Madonna in white. Then comes the whole question of symbolism, or the inherent or accepted relation between colour and thought and feeling. Now, I think it probable that Overbeck sacrificed harmonies pleasing to the eye for the sake of arrangements that might inculcate doctrines or impress emotions. Certain it is that he looked on colour as something carnal: the example of the Venetian painters warned him against passionate excess, and so as a religious artist he felt it a duty to use sombre pigments, tertiary tints, and low, shadowy tones. Thus much needs explanation, yet it must always be cause for regret that Overbeck did not take for examples such masters of colour as Fra Angelico and Perugino, and thus gain the heavenly radiance begotten of religion.

The art of Overbeck will live by its merits despite its defects; it is vital and enduring in the three mental elements of thought, form, and composition. The last he matured and mastered with the certainty of a science and the beauty of an art. His compositions have the exactitude, and occasionally the complexity, of geometric problems, neither are they without the rhythm of a stanza, or the music of a song.

How much and in what manner the art of Overbeck was due to direct inspiration from heaven is not easy to determine. But, at all events, the modern master, like his forerunners in the spiritual school of Umbria, watched and waited, fasted, prayed, and painted. One who observed him closely testifies how, while making the draw-

ings for *The Gospels* and *The Seven Sacraments*, he was penetrated with the life of Christ. From deep wells the infinite soul flowed into the finite mind, and the art conceived in the spirit of prayer issued as a renewed prayer to God.

The reader, I trust, has formed a judgment as to the three-fold relation in which Overbeck and his works stand to nature, to historic precedent, and lastly, to inward consciousness or individual character. We have seen that the notion prevalent in Rome, that the living model was wholly discarded, is inaccurate; bearing on this moot point may be here told an anecdote. It is related how one morning, when the artist was engaged on the Tasso frescoes, in the Villa Massimo, he had need of the life for a muscular arm, and so sallied forth into the neighbouring Piazza of the Lateran and made appeal to some men who were breaking stones on the road. One of the number, of amazing muscle, consented to sit, but, to the disgust of the purist painter, the man turned out to be a public executioner, who only took to stone breaking when slack of usual work. Another story is to the effect that, one day a fellow of terrific aspect entered the studio, declaring he was without food, and demanding engagement as a model. He turned out a villain, and so the aversion grew to coming in contact with common and unclean nature. Another reason assigned for the non-employment of models is the lack of sufficient strength to sustain protracted study from the life. Hence recourse to other methods: for instance, both mental and pencil notes were taken of casual figures and incidents in society or in the public streets. John Gibson, the sculptor, cultivated a like habit. Also a remarkable memory, of which much might

be told, served as a storehouse of pictorial materials. It is recounted how on Sunday evenings, after the reception in the studio of fifty or a hundred guests, the meditative artist would recall and describe the visitors one by one, and after many years, and perhaps in a distant place, meeting some person, otherwise unknown, he would say, "I remember to have seen that face once in my painting-room." In like manner his memory was peopled with figures, whose acquaintance he had made only in pictures: thus, when he came to paint *The Assumption* for Cologne Cathedral, he had recourse to the mental vision of the Madonna, derived from an old Sienese panel, and, when charged with the plagiarism, he replied: "The figure realises my idea, and I do not see why I should search further." Thus, however, it came to pass that he borrowed more and more from others, just in proportion as he took less from nature. But in coming to a fair judgment, we have to remember that the accidents in nature, and the grosser materialism in man, were foreign to this super-sensuous art, the aim being to reach the hidden meaning and the inner life. Hence the favourite practice of placing and posing in the painting-room some well-chosen figure which was quietly looked at, carefully considered, and taken in; thus the irrelevant elements were eliminated, and only the essential truths assimilated. This was for Overbeck the saving study of nature: he made extracts and essences, elaborated generic types, and thus his art became supreme in beauty. However, the beautiful is not always new, neither is the new always beautiful.

The painter's relation to the historic schools of Christian Art has been so fully stated, that little more remains

to be said. The old masters were studied much in the same way as nature: their spirit was inhaled, and just as John Gibson was accustomed to ask, What would the Greeks have done? so Overbeck put himself in the place of the early Italian painters, and desired that his pencil might be guided by their spirit. Like Raphael, what he borrowed he made his own, and often added an aspect and a grace peculiar to himself. A gallery of pictures was for him what a well-stored library is to a literary student, who takes from the shelves the author best supplying the intellectual food needed. The method is not new or strange: Bacon teaches how the moderns inherit the wisdom of the ancients, and surely if for art, as for learning, there be advancement in store, old pictures, like old books, must give up the treasure of a life beyond life. Overbeck in the past sought not for the dead, but for the living and enduring.

Given a painter's genius and surroundings, his art usually follows under the law of cause and effect. Overbeck's pictures, as those of others, yield under analysis as their component parts, nature plus tradition, plus individual self. As to the individual man, we have found Overbeck the poet and philosopher, the mystic, somewhat the sentimentalist, and, above all, the devout Catholic. The character is singularly interesting, and the products are unusually complex. He had forerunners and many imitators, yet he stands alone, and were his pencil lost, a blank would be felt in the realm of art. His genius was denied grandeur: he did not rise to the epic, and scarcely expanded into the dramatic; his path was comparatively narrow; his kingdom remained small, yet where he stands is hallowed ground; his art is musical, altogether lyrical,

yet toned with pathos, as if the lamentations of The Holy Women at the Sepulchre mingled with the angel-voices of The Nativity. The man and his work are among the most striking and unaccustomed phenomena of the century, and so far as his art is true to God, humanity, and nature, it must endure. His own assurance is left on record: he held that knowledge and doing are of value only so far as they ennoble humanity, and lead to that which is eternal. He believed in the dependence of art on personal character, on elevation of mind and purity of motive. The noblest destiny of the race was ceaselessly before him, and he looked to Christian Art as the means of showing to the world the everlasting truth, and of raising the reality of life to the ideal. In conclusion, I think it not too much to claim Overbeck as the most perfect example, in our time, of the Christian Artist.

The pecuniary rewards of the painter were in no fair proportion to his talents or his industry. His labour, as we have seen, was primarily for the honour of art and religion, and his protracted modes of study, as well as the esoteric character of his compositions, were little likely to meet with adequate return. Overbeck never realised large sums; his prices measured by present standards were ridiculously low, and even when overcrowded with commissions, he is known to have fallen short of ready cash. Happily, after early struggles, he became relieved from pressing anxieties, yet he remained comparatively poor.

Overbeck's influence, the example of his life, the principles of his art, extended far and wide throughout Europe. In France, the German master won the reverence of the Christian artist Flandrin. In England,

Pugin held him up to students as a bright example. In Vienna and Prague, Joseph Führich, as a disciple, worked diligently. In Munich, Heinrich Hess, and in Spire, Johann Schraudolph, painted extended series of frescoes allied to the same Christian school. In Düsseldorf like traditions live:—Deger, Ittenbach, Carl and Andreas Müller studied in Rome, and their frescoes in the Rhine chapel at Remagen were inspired by Overbeck. And specially does the mantle of the revered painter rest on his friend Eduard Steinle; important works at Strasbourg, Cologne, Frankfort, Münster, Klein-Heubach, and Reineck, respond to the spirit of the great artist who, dead, yet speaks.

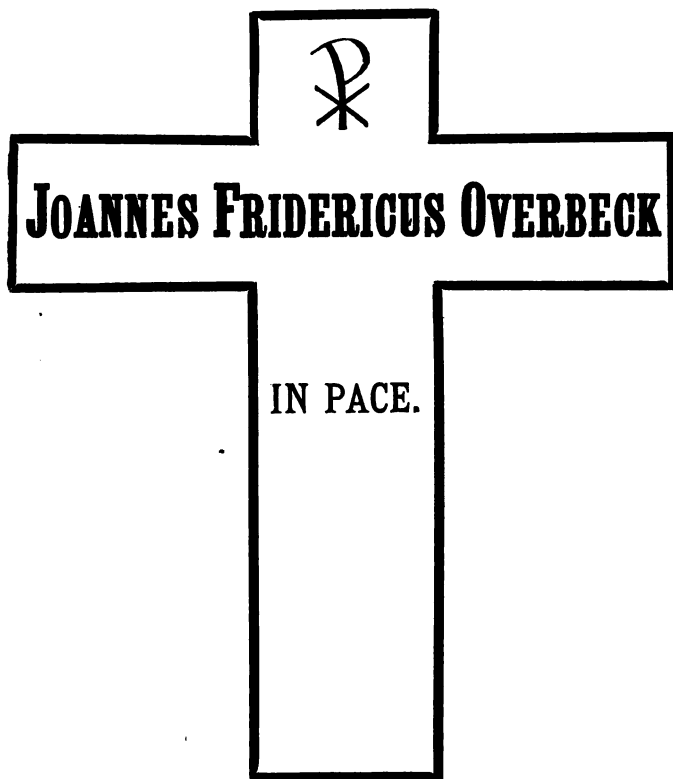
Brief is the narrative of the approaching end. The infirmities of age scarcely abated the ardent pursuit of an art dear as life itself. Overbeck had suffered from an affection of the eyes, and his later drawings, notwithstanding partial panegyrists, betray a faltering hand, together with some incoherence in thought, or, at least, in the relation of the parts to the whole. For some time, in fact, vitality had been ebbing from his work. The summer of 1869 found him in his favourite retreat of Rocca di Papa, and we are told he was "still busily creating." His country dwelling stood among beauties which, in illness as in health, came with healing power. From this sylvan quietude the aged painter, in June, wrote to his dear friend, Director Steinle, a letter abounding in love and aspiration; he dwells on the serenity of the Italian sky, on the splendour of the landscape stretching before his eye into the far distance; with characteristic modesty he laments that even in old age he is not sufficiently advanced for the great task set before him,

and desires without intermission to turn to good account the time still left; and then he counsels his "Brother in Christ" to direct the mind steadfastly towards the glorious olden days which point to the blessed goal.

Overbeck, on his return to Rome in the autumn of 1869, resumed his accustomed order of life. One who knew him well in later years relates that he was to be found in his studio in the early morning, that, after a short interval at noon, he resumed work till stopped by the darkness of evening, and that, such was the wealth of material stored in the mind, that he went on inventing without aid from usual outward appliances. He still sought utmost tranquillity, and any intrusion on the hours of study became extremely painful to him. Latterly he had been engaged on a small composition of *The Last Judgment*; also he was occupied on designs illustrative of human life—a series which had advanced as far as the *Return from Church of the Wedding Party*. Such were the congenial avocations when, on the fourteenth day after the return home, he was seized with a severe cold on the chest. Yet the symptoms so far yielded to medical treatment that in eight days the danger had passed. Suddenly, however, ensued a total failure of power, yet for the most part the mind remained unclouded. A day or two before death he asked for a piece of charcoal, and added a few touches to a design on which lately he had been working; and at times, when apparently unconscious, he would look upwards, raise and move his hand as if in the act of drawing. He prayed almost without ceasing, was grateful for each kindness, and with dying lips had a loving and comforting word for everyone. The last sinking came in quietness; sustained by the

consolations of religion he fell asleep towards six o'clock in the evening of Friday, the 12th of November, in the eightieth year of his age. He lay as he had lived—in peace; and near his bed was placed the drawing on which he had lately worked, also the small cartoon of *The Last Judgment*.

The next day, according to the painter's wish, the body was taken by the hands of his brother artists to San Bernardo, the little parish church near his house, where he worshipped, and where he is still remembered. An eye-witness writes from Rome to Lübeck, on the 18th of November: "I have just come from the burial of our great fellow-countryman. Amid universal grief the funeral mass took place this morning. The mournful ceremony was performed by a German bishop assisted by Cistercian monks; many artists and German students were present, and joined in psalms composed by the Abbé Liszt. The whole function was most solemn, as if the pious spirit of the departed had entered the whole assembly. Around the bier were gathered Protestants as well as Roman Catholics; the coffin bore the many orders which the artist had received, but was never seen to wear; and at the feet lay the crown of laurels which his Roman brethren reverently offered to their acknowledged chief." The body lies in the chapel of St. Francis of Assisi, within the church of San Bernardo. The resting-place is marked by a white marble cross, let into the wall, bearing the inscription "Joannes Fridericus Overbeck—In Pace."



THE RESTING-PLACE OF OVERBECK IN THE CHURCH OF SAN BERNARDO, ROME, IS
MARKED BY A CROSS OF WHITE MARBLE BORDERED WITH BLACK, AND BEARING
AN INSCRIPTION AS ABOVE.



CHRONOLOGY OF THE LIFE OF OVERBECK.

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6



MEISSONIER

BY

JOHN W. MOLLETT, B.A.

OFFICIER DE L'INSTRUCTION PUBLIQUE, FRANCE

AUTHOR OF 'LIFE OF SIR DAVID WILKIE'

ETC



NEW YORK

SCRIBNER AND WELFORD

LONDON

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE, & RIVINGTON

1882

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CHISWICK PRESS:—C. WHITTINGHAM AND CO. TOOKS COURT,
CHANCERY LANE.



PREFACE.

IN all matters of disputation I think that the biographer and the critic should be two persons: the witness should not assume the function of the advocate.

There is no greater temptation than hero-worship to the student of the life of a man of genius and industry and worth, and it is impossible to study the history of such a life as the following without becoming filled with sympathy for its subject.

I should, therefore, had I attempted criticisms of my own, have been a partial and worthless judge. The question of M. Meissonier's merit in the great arena in which his temporary, or permanent, victory has been won will not be decided in our day. He represents a method of dealing with art which is, and will always be, detestable to one school of thought, and admirable to its opposite. He is essentially, if I may use the expression, a *party painter*, and, as the permanent victory of his school would represent the overthrow of the whole system of theories and principles which the lovers of the "IDEAL" call the Renaissance of Art, so the history of his success, in the judgment of the academic writers of his own country, offers only a new application of Voltaire's celebrated *mot*, "*Demandez au crapaud ce que c'est que la beauté,*" &c.

For the conflict which will rage over his memory, as it

does to this day over that of many an ancient master, I contribute a few tumbrils of ammunition to either side, and have found the impartial setting down in order of a selection of conflicting criticisms the most convenient form of doing so. The work, as happily the life, is far from complete. Unlike the work of the Master himself, the details are only indicated, but they refer the student who cares to go deeper into the subject, to sources which will lead him further; and, I hope, supply the less careful reader with a general idea of the significance, for good or for evil as he may have been led to regard it, of Meissonier's mission in art.

J. W. M.

L. BLACKHEATH,
October, 1881.



LE BON COUSIN.

From the *Contes Rémois*.



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¹ Given in the Sale "Catalogue de Tableaux, composant la gallerie de M. John W. Wilson" (March, 1881).

* * The etchings numbered 5, 8, 11 are published by Messrs. Goupil et Cie. of Paris, and Bedford Street, Covent Garden.



LE BON HOTELIER.
From the "Contes Rémois."



MEISSONIER.

CHAPTER I.

IT has happened to M. Meissonier, perhaps, as often as to any living man of celebrity, to have the pleasure of reading the history of his own life, written from the point of view of a biographer constrained by a necessity, which must have been very amusing to his subject, to evolve the greatest part of his work out of a process of imagination and conjecture. The life of the Nestor of French art is not yet public, and it is to be hoped, in consideration of the important epoch that his works mark, that his Boswell will in due time arise. In the meantime his works are before the world, and among them, the most characteristic and interesting, his *houses*. Every biographical notice of M. Meissonier begins with a description of his ateliers at Paris or at Poissy, in the arrangement and decoration of which he has expressed in the concrete the ideal of his earliest pictures, "Le milieu explique l'homme, l'atelier commente l'œuvre." The saying of Diderot, with which M. Jules

Claretie heads his recently-published biographical sketch, has more truth with reference to M. Meissonier than in general.

The Paris house of M. Meissonier is in the Boulevard Malesherbes, near the Parc Monceau; a brilliantly-written description of it has appeared in "The World" (of June 2, 1880). It is in the heart of the artists' quarter, and the architecture of the whole neighbourhood is as characteristic of its inhabitants as our own Hampstead and other quarters where artists congregate. M. Meissonier has built his house in the style of the Italian Renaissance:—

"There is little to see outside, beyond a large expanse of masonry as neatly joined as a piece of cabinet-work: but within, you have the terraces and the arcades which form such charming backgrounds in the pictures of the Italian School. It is the Italian Renaissance adapted, of course, to modern French needs. The *porte cochère* is very much like any other *porte cochère*, and seems only to promise you a mansion of the common type; but pass through it and you are in a spacious courtyard, in one corner whereof you see a richly-carved Gothic stairway, with an arched terrace forming the boundary on the other side. There is little ornamentation on the outside of the turret; just as much as the style permits, no more: but what there is, is simply as delicate in workmanship as a bit of embroidery painted by Meissonier's own hand. This is true of all the place. The owner has chosen a style which admits but sparingly of ornament, and which depends chiefly for its effect on the purity of unbroken line. But where the ornament comes in, he has taken care to have it of the best. He has been his own designer. For the years during which the house has been in progress, he has worked as an architect as well as a painter. Not a bit of the decoration in galleries, staircases, and rooms but has been done from his own designs. He has kept rigorously to the laws of his design. You pass from the courtyard to the studio, through a pillared hall, and up a staircase rich in carved panelling, for in the interior the style admits of somewhat greater luxuriance. Then you come to the prime wonder of the house—its immense studio. There are two ateliers; but

the larger one, for some reason best known to the painter, serves as a kind of antechamber to the smaller. The latter is a retreat to which Meissonier, who is one of the shyest of men, escapes from the world. It is difficult to give an idea of the amplitude of the great one without going into measurements; but certainly it would hold the deliberative assembly of a small State. Here again a rich panelling runs round the walls, and the place looks too fine for daily work. From the smaller studio we may pass out into the open air by a gallery which forms the roof of the arcade, and make the round of the premises to the coach-houses and stables, all in perfect keeping of style. Even the back stairs are, in their way, exquisite specimens of early Italian work."

The hall is hung with curtains and tapestry, the windows are shaded by finely-interlaced ornaments of ironwork; but M. Jules Claretie, in his visit to Meissonier in 1871, which he describes, was most astonished at the works of art with which the studio, large as it is, was "encumbered:" sketches, small panels, and wax models, the instruments of his daily work, and among the pictures hanging upon the walls, a water-colour portrait of the painter himself, seated, wearing a pair of high shooting-boots, with a dog at his side; a landscape of Italy, glowing with sunlight, a grove of enormous olive trees dappling the pathway with shadow; a portrait of Meissonier's medical attendant, hung by the side of a picture by Metsu; and, "in the centre of the wall, opening it out like a window, a canvas of enormous dimensions, representing the demolished palace of the Tuileries, the heap of ruins that were left from the wreckage of May 1871, and, dominating the mounds of grey or gilded fragments, the bronze chariot on the Arc du Carrousel appearing through a break in the cloud of smoke, sharply outlined against the blue sky behind it." Masterpieces of art are scattered broadcast over the room: a courtyard of the time of Louis XIII., brilliantly crowded with figures in

gala dress; a bride of the same period, stepping into an elegant carriage of a crimson colour, for which Meissonier had a miniature model, built by a coachmaker, to study from; a superb work of Titian—a figure of an Italian woman, in a robe of green velvet, the classic outline of her head shown against a crimson velvet curtain in the background; a sketch of Bonaparte, on horseback, at the head of his picturesquely-dressed staff, reviewing the young conscripts of the army of Italy, who are cheering as he passes, waving their hats and bayonets in the air “in a fever of enthusiasm, youth, and victory;” a company of dragoons of the Imperial army descending a hilly path in an Alsatian forest, under the guidance of a peasant; of which picture M. Claretie remarks that “every soldier has a distinct and special type of countenance;” and, in addition to the pictures, the hall is crowded with small statuettes of wax, modelled by Meissonier himself for his studies, representing such subjects as men on horseback and horses in various forms of motion, the muscles of which are modelled with a perfection of anatomical accuracy and boldness. Amongst the other objects collected in this remarkable museum are a number of bridles of black leather, with silver ornaments and curious bits, which were once the property of Murat—and a remarkable miniature portrait of M. Thiers, taken from the body after death, by Meissonier, at St. Germain, which M. Claretie describes as follows:—

“A head with closed eyes, an expression of irony still remaining about the lines of the mouth, and of sarcasm or banter (*quelque chose de narquois*) upon the waxen and motionless face; the silvery grey colour of the hair responding to the tone of the white drapery. . . . But one of the most remarkable ornaments of this atelier, crowded as it is with exquisite works of art, is the first sketch of the picture which Meissonier painted at Poissy in 1871, when his house was crowded with

German soldiers. To escape their company, in the rage that he experienced at the national defeat, he shut himself up in his studio and threw upon the canvas the most striking, the most vivid, the most *avenging* (vengeresse) of allegories: he painted Paris, enveloped in a veil of mourning, defending herself against the enemy, with her soldiers and her dying grouped round a tattered flag; sailors, officers, and fusiliers, soldiers, national guards, suffering women, and dying children; and hovering in the air above them, with the Prussian eagle by her side, was Famine, wan and haggard Famine, accomplishing the work that the bombardment had failed to achieve. . . . Henri Regnault is represented on this canvas, dying at the feet of the veiled figure of Paris."

Besides his Paris mansion, Meissonier has another at Poissy, where he lives in the summer time. Here there are two studios, one at the top of the house, and the other adjoining the stables, for use in inclement weather. "The Salon at Poissy has those quaint little square windows which so often figure in the backgrounds of his pictures. He built the country house as he built the house in town, and he fitted it up with artistic luxuriance, designing most of the furniture himself, notably the silver services of the table. Each place has cost him something in millions. The bill for the house in Paris was augmented by his resolution to have all the work of the very best. He takes a peculiar pride in the thoroughness of the mechanical part of it. The stones are beautifully fitted and joined, and the building has scarcely settled an inch since the foundations were laid."¹

Having thus far satisfied the maxim of Diderot, in a short description of the "milieu," we will, still profiting by the indiscretions of his friend M. Claretie, make acquaintance with the man whom it "explains," and after-

¹ "The World," June 2, 1880.

wards with his work—which will be a far more complex and difficult task to accomplish. We have already seen him in his patriotism, shutting himself up in his studio away from the contact of the Prussians, and there devising the allegory “vengeresse,” which he intended should cut them to the heart. It is not derogatory to the truth and earnestness of his patriotism that he should now be “a very good Republican;” although, in the time of the Empire, there is no doubt that he was attached to the dynasty of which every Frenchman, whatever he may choose to say to the contrary, is proud; if any other evidence of this were wanting, it would be found in the spirit with which he has treated the grand historical pictures that he has painted of incidents in the histories of the two Napoleons. The intense expression that he has given to the enthusiasm of the attachment of the army to their great leader, is a monument of glory to the first Napoleon that was not designed by a lukewarm partisan; nor the dignity of his sorrow in “1814,” (*La Retraite de Russie*) for which Meissonier dressed himself in an old coat of the Emperor’s, and sat on a saddle on a housetop in the falling snow of a gloomy day in winter, and so, with a mirror before him, painted in the sombre tints of the winter sky on the flesh of his face, and the flakes of snow on his coat-sleeves; nor the trumpet-toned triumph of the Battle of Solferino, nor the other historical pictures which will perpetuate the old stories of victory and domination which must have become familiar to the painter in his cradle.

He was born at Lyons in the year 1811. One writer says 1813; but M. Claretie tells us very briefly that, after an infancy of poverty, a difficult entrance into life, at the age of nineteen he came to Paris, in the year 1830; an arrival full of vicissitudes, and dangers, and sorrows.

"Well for him that he was born robust—but what is a struggle, even in misery, for a true-born artist? 'L'art vit de misère, il meurt de richesse!' says M. Alexandre Dumas. I have read somewhere, I do not remember where, that in these dark days of his *débuts*, Meissonier used to work, side by side with Daubigny, at the production of pictures for five francs per square mètre, for export. It is perhaps only a studio tradition. But it is a fact that Tony Johannot, to whom Meissonier exhibited his studies at that time, gave him encouragement, and that Léon Cogniet opened his studio to him. But he had nothing to gain from Cogniet; he brought to his earliest works his master qualities, his gift of seeing and describing objects with originality, an incomparable understanding of physiognomy and of costume, refinement of touch, extraordinary accuracy of drawing, the sharp expression of mental emotion in the expression of the features, strict truthfulness in the painting of accessories. He was Metz, Miéris, or Terburg, possessing besides qualities peculiarly his own, elegant, very fascinating, and very French."

Of his early life he is said to be reluctant to speak, and, as we have seen, even the date of his birth is not free from a slight mystery of uncertainty. A French writer, we are told, who went to him for the first biography which appeared, was astonished at his reluctance to furnish any details of his life. His natural love of retirement is attributed by the writer to timidity, and to the fact that he has been severely and, with his peculiar temperament, exceptionally, tried by the misfortunes of his country; but when one has studied through the long line of his works of art, and has noticed how completely they are characterized by the quality of *individuality*, uninfluenced by any of the currents of opinion and taste that have flowed round them, another reason appears for the separation or solitude of such a life as his. His art, and the means by which he pursued it, being the whole of his life, and differing in its nature from the art that he saw prevailing around him, he seems

to have set himself to a steady, self-contained career, developing with unsparing industry his own methods, and probably not less happy, as he certainly is not less eminent, in his life than the most festive or the most political of his colleagues. However this may be, M. Claretie says of him that—

“That which is most pleasing with Meissonier, is the frank cordiality with which he explains his plans, and looks in your face the while with his deep, clear eyes (*de son œil profonde et franc*) for the truth of your meaning in reply. This man, who lives in a palace, is as moderate as a soldier on the march. This artist whose canvases are valued by the half million is as generous as a nabob. He will give to a charity sale a picture worth the price of a house. Hospitably friendly (*accueillant*) to all, and praised as he is by everybody, he has less conceit in his nature than a wholesale painter (*que des barbouilleurs à la toise*). With his hair growing thickly above his broad and open forehead, his beard flowing down over his breast like a river, his robust activity ‘*de bon cavalier*,’ he is at the age of sixty-eight as solid and as active as at forty. You see him to be ‘well-seasoned,’ sympathetic, and safe; a man who loves his friends as he loves the Truth, with all the passion of a man of twenty years.”

This is his compatriot’s description of M. Meissonier’s personality, and I think it is a better one than the following by the writer in “The World.”

“He is as short as the average French linesman, but very broad. There is nothing of the typical genius about the outer man. He has but to sit opposite a looking-glass to have an excellent model of a professor of gymnastics, or a fencing-master growing old. He has a round full face, plenty of colour in his cheeks, and a bright eye, so animated in its expression that it makes you entirely forget the effect of his grey hair and beard. Intellectually and physically he would seem to be still in his prime. A friend who is modelling a statuette of him, which stands in the studio, has admirably caught this effect of wiry robustness which is the note of the figure. He has put him in the short pilot-jacket in which he usually works, and has

planted him very firmly on his legs. He has seized, in fact, the expression of a body as well as the expression of a face, and this is one of the rarest things in portrait art."

In the "Gazette des Beaux Arts" for 1862, the May number is almost entirely devoted to M. Meissonier; it contains first a sketch of his life and work as a painter, by M. Théophile Gautier, and immediately following upon that an account of his engraved work. It is to this last that we now turn for the clue to the story of the steady progress of Meissonier's skill and success, and especially for the influence that kept him aloof from all the theories and novelties of his time and started him at the threshold of his career upon a course clearly indicated in his earliest works, and from which he seems never to have been tempted to deflect. It is in the quality of his earliest illustrations that the germs of that of his latest and most successful paintings are to be found; and the methods of careful elaboration and conscientious combination of detail that he applied to his earliest *culs de lampe* foreshadow the brilliant successes of his pencil when years of practice had grafted boldness and freedom upon the unerring precision of truthfulness "en gros et en détail" with which he seems to have been gifted in the cradle. The earliest beginnings of M. Meissonier's work are surrounded with obscurity, and it is not accurately on record by whom he was first employed. "Seven cities of Greece," says M. Burty, "disputed the glory of producing Homer: and several editors now claim the honour of having encouraged the first beginnings of M. Meissonier." Assuming the date of the master's birth to be accurately fixed at 1811 (although even this detail is disputed, some authorities giving 1813), he would be already twenty-four years of age upon the publication of the 1835 edition of the Bible of the Sieur Raymond ("Hist. de

l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament représenté par des figures," etc. Paris, L. Curmer, éditeur, rue Sainte Anne, 1835), to which he contributed designs, on page 289, of *Holofernes invading Judea*, and *Judith appearing before Holofernes*, and on page 347 of the *Death of Eleazer*.

These designs, M. Burty assumes to have been the first from Meissonier's pencil that were actually published, although, he adds, there was a day during the early years of the reign of Louis Philippe, when, at the instigation of Trimolet, M. Meissonier went to knock at the door of an editor in the Rue St. Jacques, taking with him four little sepia drawings destined, in his dreams, to illustrate a fairy tale in some children's magazine. The editor, a man of sense, said that the drawings were charming, but he drew back before the outlay of having them engraved, and "avec mille politesses, congédia le jeune artiste."

M. Gautier mentions as the first paintings exhibited by M. Meissonier, those of 1836, *The Chess Players* and *The Little Messenger*, which, he says, attracted a crowd of admirers, and in which he struck at once his true line as the conscientious and skilful painter of miniature subjects, in the exquisite finish of which he has been thought equal to Terborch and Metsu. The period of exquisite finish and minute detail will, however, be best studied in the engraved work of the master, which has the further great value of indicating *ab initio* his higher quality of sympathy, and of that so-called *grandeur* which can be found in the smallest as well as in the largest works, and in simple domestic subjects or objects of still life as well as in the highest classical school, which is really the distinguishing characteristic of Meissonier and his peers in art, and implies in the artist the existence of a true vocation for his pursuit.

M. Gautier was, however, apparently, mistaken in assum-



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ing the pieces he names to have been the first exhibited by M. Meissonier; for there is in the collection of Sir Richard Wallace a small picture, called *The Visitors*, of an interior, with an old gentleman receiving two visitors—all in the costume of the period of our James I., which is not remarkable so much for the finish of its detail, as for a Rembrandt-like management of the light falling on the heads and white ruffs of the figures, and reflected from a claret-jug and glasses on a table. To the back of a photograph taken from this canvas M. Meissonier has been good enough to attach the following autograph memorandum:—"Mon premier tableau exposé en 1833 ou 1834; acheté *cent francs* par La Société des amis des Arts à Paris, et adjugé à M. Poturle, qui l'a toujours gardé. Après sa mort il a été acheté par Sir Richard Wallace."—M.

M. Burty describes five woodcuts, of a very early date, which he found torn from the leaves of some scrap book or journal; representing in a mingled humorous and pathetic sentiment as many scenes from the life of "The Old Bachelor." They will show the class of work to which the young painter first bent his energies, in which, if he had persevered, he might have achieved a success for which the nation would have had reason to be grateful, as it might have tended to preserve the school of comic illustration in France from the utter degradation of pruriency and brutalism into which it has subsequently sunk. In the first of the series we are introduced to the Old Bachelor at his toilette, in front of his mirror, his wig on the commode in front of him. In the second he is dining with two friends, who have the air, says M. Burty, of "*de fieffés parasites*," in the next he is abused by his housekeeper, and in the fourth the poor old gentleman is seen on his death-bed surrounded by greedy relations eager for the succession

to his estate; in the last, Death has released him from his solitude, and his servants in the death chamber are already ransacking his property. There is in all this a combination of the humour of Hogarth with the sympathetic quality of the more refined humorists of our subsequent period which was developed to great promise in Meissonier's later works of illustration. The young painter was already gifted with a considerable portion of that versatility of talent which is an attribute of real genius, and showed this in the next series of illustrations, published again by his friend, M. Curmer to the "Discours sur l'Histoire universelle," for which he drew the figures of *the Prophet Isaiah*, *St. Paul*, and *Charlemagne*, besides a considerable number of tail-pieces, headings for chapters, and ornamental letters. He was engaged at the same time upon the illustrations to a new edition of Lamartine's "*Chute d'un ange*," of which the woodcuts were most unsatisfactorily engraved. It appears from the narrative of M. Burty, that the art of wood engraving was not at that time much cultivated at Paris, and the blocks of this and other early works of M. Meissonier were sent to England to be engraved, and the English engravers, says M. Burty, *massacred* them. M. Lavoignat had not yet been discovered, whom M. Burty describes as the most faithful interpreter of the works of Meissonier; "who, by details of which the caprice is astounding and the execution a miracle of rashness and refinement froze the *blacks* into *greys*, and developed all that the *furia Française* contains of *calculated impetuosity* and *serious levity*." It is not easy to follow this criticism unless by attributing to the writer some of the paradoxical qualities that he describes.

An edition in French of the "*Orlando Furioso*," published at this time with illustrations by Français, Karl

Girardet, Baron, and others, contains two woodcuts from Meissonier's designs representing (No. 1, chapter I.) *Ferragus in the wood*: (No. 2, chapter II.) *Bradamante discovering Pinabel*.

It is a most interesting occupation to follow through this series of early works the apprenticeship of a genius, in the tentative efforts of which the qualities of humour, invention, sympathy, and keen apprehension of detail are manifested, for which the master is still unrivalled, and in the companion works published under the same covers to find in Tony Johannot and the other group of illustrators with whom he was associated, the tone and character of the school in which his early years of work were principally passed. This interest especially attaches to a beautiful edition of "Paul and Virginia," and the "Chaumière Indienne," published in 1838 by M. Curmer, profusely illustrated with the assistance of a very powerful staff of artists and engravers. This very beautiful and fascinating volume contains forty-three woodcuts from Meissonier in the text, besides innumerable ornamental letters, emblematic designs called "attributs," landscapes, plants, foliage, and a few compositions; and one important vignette of the "Bay (or Valley) of the Tomb," which is a breezy and spacious landscape, finished with close fidelity both to the character and details of the tropical vegetation, and to the sentiment of the subject; the general combined effect of solitude and desolation in the midst of tropical luxuriance intensifying the pathos of the incident that it illustrates. This landscape of Meissonier's impressed the other artists engaged in the work so favourably that, among the "attributs" of the book itself:—a little emblem picture at the head of the Table of Contents:—along with the portraits of François and Tony Johannot, the painter's easel and other accessories,

a miniature reproduction of "The Bay of the Tomb" has been inserted; as though it were regarded among the illustrations as the gem of the collection. In the floral and other ornaments of initial letters, and head and tail pieces of chapters, Meissonier's minute attention to Nature produces the happiest effects. "These engravings," says M. Burty, "have a peculiar interest, because they are the work of the master's youth; and they show him already rendering Nature in a style quite his own; to look through them is like turning over a volume of his '*cahiers d'études*.' They contain evidence of long and careful work in the hot-houses of the '*Jardin des Plantes*,' and in front of the old bric-a-brac dealers' stalls which used to stand about the entrance to the Louvre. And how admirably, with the help of these slowly and scrupulously finished studies, he could reproduce in an ornamental letter or floral ornament, a lily broken by the storm, or a sheaf of Indian arms and musical instruments!"

To the "*Chaumière Indienne*," published in continuation in the same volume, Meissonier contributed no less than eighty-six woodcuts, which lighten up the gentle pathos of St. Pierre's work with humour and manliness, and leaving it as delicate and tender as before, bring into the foreground all that is quaint and humorous in its incidents. In the scene, for instance, where the brave old English Doctor sits on the wharf and recalls to mind his wanderings in many lands in search of truth, we have a panoramic procession of the images passing through his mind: the "Jewish Rabbis," in hats and beards and an air of shrewdness and wealth about them—with whom the Doctor is friendly and persuasive; "the Protestant ministers," clean shaven and cold of humour, attired in black skull caps and Geneva gowns; the "overseers of the Lutheran Church" in Elizabethan

frills—with whom the Doctor is disputatious; and the smug and trim “Catholic Doctors,” orthodox and respectable from their wigs to their shoe-buckles, with whom he is courtly and polite. Then the “Academicians of Paris, La Crusca, the Arcadi, and the twenty-four other most celebrated Academies of Italy,” all snoring round a table in every imaginable attitude of repose, under the Doctor’s longiloquence, from whom the Doctor is departing in a huff, with his wig awry. And this is followed by the long procession of Greek Popes, Turkish Mollahs, Arab Sheikhs, Parsees and Indian Pandects, each one of whom is recognizable, and characteristically distinct.

Many might read Bernardin de St. Pierre without entering fully into the fun of his pedantic periods, but the humour of Meissonier’s illustrations, as soberly and seriously expressed is as obvious as it is original and sympathetic. The marvellous skill with which he can arrange a large or complicated subject in a nutshell, is exemplified in these little woodcuts.

There is one, not an inch square, containing no less than eleven typical heads of Indians, each characteristically distinct, where “the Pandects, the Fakeers, the Santons, the Joguis, the Brahmins, and their disciples,” all cry out at once against the Doctor when he protests against the shutting up of knowledge in their privileged caste; and there is an admirable individuality in the person of the good impassible Doctor himself, who is always the same old friend, in his varied perplexities—bewildered amongst the fascinating Bayadères; or patiently undergoing purification in the Ganges; or striding up to the audience of the priest of Juggernaut enveloped in a cotton sheet; or sitting at home among his books and remembering his friend the Pariah. Some critic, most unfairly judging

Meissonier by a conventional rule, has pronounced him devoid of sentiment. But what more manly or pathetic sentiment can be desired than that which lurks beneath the humour of a little vignette of the incident of the Pariah? The whole picture, an inch in height, scarcely crosses a page. It represents a slip of wall, with a picture at either end, one labelled "The Pariah thinking of the English Doctor," and the other, "The English Doctor thinking of the Pariah," and in the middle on a nail driven into the wall hang the pipes that they exchanged at parting. "The Doctor's pipe of English leather with a mouthpiece of yellow amber," and "The Pariah's pipe of a bamboo stem and a *furnace* of clay," and underneath the pipes a paper is pinned to the wall with the inscription "*La pipe du Docteur et celle du Paria, tirés du cabinet de M. Meissonier.*" The drawing of the Pariah's hut, minute as it is, is really beautiful: a quiet and cool interior with a sunny landscape of plaintains and palms revealed through the open door; and the Doctor's library is a paradise of books and papers, and what may be called "Meissonier" furniture and accessories. This microcosm is very typical of the painter's subsequent work, and from this his exhibited picture of "The Doctor" was suggested.¹ That the *sentiment* of Meissonier's work is not, and never was, in harmony with that predominant in French art, is a fact emphasized by his persistent avoidance of female subjects; and, as to its *humour*, when we see what French "humorous" art of the present day is, we may be permitted to regret that it ever supplanted his.

In 1840, in an official account, published by Curmer, of

¹ The edition of 1839 in which the above illustrations occur is not a rare book. A later edition of 1863 contains many of the same plates.

the transfer of the remains of the Emperor Napoleon I., from the island of St. Helena to Paris, two woodcuts from Meissonier illustrate the *Entrance into Havre*, and *The Quays at Rouen*; and during the years 1841 to 1843, he contributed regularly to a serial publication, also edited by Curmer, called "Les Français peints par eux mêmes: Encyclopédie morale du xix^e. siècle." (Paris, L. Curmer, éditeur, 1841-1843.) Every one of his studies in this work will repay the trouble of referring to it, and the whole collection, in the great variety of subjects that it includes, is a striking evidence of the versatility of his genius. In the first volume (p. 333, "Le maître d'études") we have a full-length figure of a schoolmaster; a man clumsily framed, and dressed with that combination of precision in style and slovenliness in detail, and expressing in his attitude and face that hard sort of weariness by which the inferior members of his profession are distinguished. The drawing is amazingly coloured, and is attributed in the index to Gavarni, but it is signed by Meissonier. In the second volume the story of "The Artist's Model" has a little vignette by Meissonier, of a poor little drudge of a girl, pathetically weary, posing, partly unclad, showing the thinness and feebleness of her form, in a constrained attitude to a fat, coarse painter, who seems himself half asleep over his work; and a head-piece (to "L'agent de change"), full of animation and incident, of the frantic Babel of shouting and gesticulations that goes on at the busiest period of the day round the ring in the centre of the Bourse. This little piece is crowded with figures of whom each has its independent character and action; and near it is another minute vignette representing the proud and sagacious stock-broker driving home in his gig. These drawings are free from exaggeration or forced humour, but far more lively and

comic in effect than the wildly drawn caricatures that were published in "Punch" and Dickens's works, and other serials in England at the same time.

"The Poet," in an attitude of painful expectation, trying to stare down a thought from the ceiling; the "Pêcheur à la ligne," a broad and sunny view of the quays and barges on the Seine, and of the sleepy riverside life of the "Ile de Paris;" and the head-piece to the "Sportsman Parisien," a stable interior, very beautifully finished, follow in succession in the same volume, as though Meissonier had determined to run through the whole range of possible subjects for his pencil in the shortest possible time. The horses, in form and in the texture of their coats, approach perfection. There is a little ornamental O close by, representing the sportsman, "displayed" in a most natural attitude on the broad of his back, and his horse throwing up his heels as he plunges through the initial letter, which is very full of humour. In the third volume, published also in 1841, he illustrated the "Mendiants" with a figure of an old fiddler; and the "Amateur de livres" with another of an old bookworm; and in the fourth volume there is an initial vignette to "Les Pauvres," of a blind beggar, of the able-bodied, ruffianly sort, led by a delicate boy, which suggests his subsequent illustrations to "Lazarillo;" and a coloured full-length of an old-clothes dealer, which is smothered in the colouring.

This volume, however, contains two gems in illustration of "The Cobbler," called, in Parisian *argot*, "Le Gniaffe," a term of abuse, if we may judge from the quotation attached, "c'est lui M'sieu le Commissaire qui a k'mmencé par m'appeler *gniaffe*."

The first, a full-length coloured print, represents, we are told, not the servile and obsequious species, but the *gniaffe*



THE READER

pur sang, "au cœur noble, à l'ame élevée et ombrageuse, qui, en dépit de toutes les sirènes de la corruption, s'est maintenu dans l'indépendance la plus absolue et la plus primitive;" obviously a surly old republican, a lean man with gnarled and knotted hands and bunioned feet, and a truculent mouth and chin. The second figure is of the species *gorret*, which, we are told, is a derisive corruption of the word *correct*, applied in several trades to the chief of the journey-men apprentices—the *gorret* again being of two kinds, the pasting (à la pâte), and the cutting out *gorret*.

The *gorret à la pâte*, says the author, "whom we have selected for one of our types, and whom M. Meissonier, 'ce jeune peintre du plus bel avenir,' has reproduced with a remarkable truth to nature, belongs to a 'berloque de boueux," which is, in ordinary language, a bootmaker's shop." The sturdy old patriarch is represented, as he is described in the text, sitting at his "veilloire," or little square table, "surrounded," as Mr. Venus would say, "by the trophies of his art," sometimes singing and working, and beating time on the leather, letting his last word fall with the last blow of the hammer; or, at other times, discoursing gravely from the depth of his philosophy, as, for instance, "Our religion is absurd, and good for the people. The Protestant religion à la bonne heure! En voila une de religion! ils adorent un cochon, c'est vrai! mais c'est plus naturel!"

Another series of "Les Français" was issued at the same time, illustrating the provincial and foreign types of French subjects, and to this Meissonier contributed some remarkable drawings, of which the chief in interest are landscape and sea-pieces. For "Le Lutteur," in the first volume of this series, he drew a moonlight view of the ruins of the arena of the Roman amphitheatre at Nismes; on one side

the darkness of the shadow of the circular walls is interrupted by the moonlight streaming through the arched doorways and windows, and its irregular outline is contrasted against a bright but stormy sky above; on the opposite side, where the light falls full on the whiteness of the crumbling masonry, these apertures are so many black shadows, and the sky over this part is dark with driving clouds. In the interior of the deserted arena there is an expression of solitude and sleep; and in rising to the sky overhead the eye seems to escape out of an oppressive enclosure.

In the same volume is "Le Religieux," a figure of a monk, described as a portrait of Dom François et Chartreux, in an attitude of submissive devotion, illustrating the motto, from the "Album de la Chartreuse":—

"illis summa fuit gloria despici:
illis divitiæ, pauperiem pati:
illis summa voluptas,
Longo supplicio mori."

"Le Capitaine de Commerce," in the same volume, is illustrated by Meissonier with a view of the entrance to the harbour at Havre. A fresh breeze is blowing, and a lively chopping sea is beating against the pier; a boat, crowded with men, is so microscopically finished that, in figures the size of a pin's head, the different actions of rowing and steering can be distinguished; and there is some wonderfully minute and accurate work among the tangled forest of masts and spars in the inner harbour, and truthfulness in the ship righting herself on her keel as she brails up or lowers her canvas, and comes under the lee of the buildings on entering the inner harbour. Then, anybody who knows Havre would recognize the picture as a portrait of the prettily crowded town and the hills beyond it.

In the second volume is a stately view of the broad river

and quays at Rouen, a study of Normandy pippins, and a sea-piece. Also a landscape (to "Le Foresien"), a view of Montbrison, Forez, a district remarkable for the smoke of its iron manufactories. Here, on a small engraving, we can see miles upon miles of level plain, extended under a murky sky, and bordered by mountains in the distance; churches, villages, chalets, smoking factories, and groves of poplars, indicate the middle plans; as you look, a black speck develops into a window, a few scratches above into a roof, a group of houses starts up, and village after village, with here and there a tall chimney vomiting smoke, carry the eye forward across the Lilliputian landscape towards the forest at the base of the mountain. In the third volume we are taken to Algeria; and Meissonier has drawn an Arab encampment, with camels as true to nature as those of Herr Gentz, in Ebers's "Egypt." This should have been an important drawing, but, as M. Burty very justly remarks, it has been *massacred* by the engraver. "It may be noticed, once for all," he adds, "that all the English engravers who have touched the woods of M. Meissonier, 'en ont retiré la fleur,' under their burin everything disappears; refinement of tone, harmony of design, spirit of detail."

Two little children's books, published about 1845, by Hetzel, were illustrated by Meissonier; an edition of the "Ile des Plaisirs," of Fénelon, and the "Story of a Doll and a Leaden Soldier," by P. Stahl. These little stories were republished in the "Nouveau Magasin des Enfants," Paris, Hachette, 1861. The illustrations have no importance at all.

In the following year a new edition of "Gil Blas" was preceded by an introduction by M. L. Viardot, and a translation of the story of "Lazarillo de Tormes," which was illustrated with nine small woodcuts in the text, and one

large cut apart, by Meissonier; the latter represents Lazarillo in his Spanish cloak, rapier at his side, and square hat. All of the cuts were engraved by Lavoignat, are very full of humour, and suggestive of the influence of Velazquez. The first shows Lazarillo, as a child, eating his mother's cakes. In the second, in his service of the blind man, he is leading his master abroad and begging for him; in the next the blind man is jealously holding a cup of wine with both hands, from which Lazarillo is sucking the contents through a straw; the fourth is a figure of the tinker who lends him a key for the strong box of his master, the priest, who is leaving him to starve of hunger; the next is the squire who, without a maravedí in his pocket, figures for a man of fashion; the next, the villainous monk, who gives Lazarillo his first pair of shoes, is said to be a copy from a painting of the same dimensions by Karel Dujardin. In the following sketch we have Lazarillo after his accession to fortune, when he is fitting himself out at the clothes-shop with the "costume d'un homme de bien,"—a doublet of faded plush, a well-worn cloak of cloth, and a sword of the period of the Cid. The series finishes with the entry of Lazarillo and his German friends of the suite of Charles V. into one of those cabarets which "they went into on their own legs, but left on those of other people." The last series of illustrations of this kind that require notice are those of the "Contes Rémois" and of the "Comédie Humaine" of Balzac, published in 1855; in the latter of which the freshness of humour remarkable in his former work has given place to a gloomy spirit of caustic satire, by no means so agreeable; indicating that perhaps it was all for the best that the master, now grown eminent as a painter, determined to relinquish this branch of his art to others.

I have mentioned, upon the authority of the master

himself, that M. Gautier and M. Claretie are both mistaken in assuming that the *Chess-Players* and the *Little Messenger*, in 1836,¹ were his first exhibited pictures; but that in 1833 or 1834 he exhibited the group described upon page 11. With reference to the dates of other works, there exists a similar uncertainty, increased by the repetition of favourite subjects, amongst which *Smokers*, *Readers*, *Chess-Players* and *Sentinels* abound; and the methodical compilation of his *œuvre* is a labour that could not be successfully undertaken without his own assistance. M. Claretie informs us in his pamphlet that, in the intervals of his painting, M. Meissonier is actually compiling a series of "Souvenirs."

Such a work, even apart from its art interest, will be strikingly interesting from the pen of one who has stood aloof, as Meissonier appears to have done, and observed, with the attention of an artist interested in the picturesque feature of events, the series of catastrophes and changes that his native country has gone through during his lifetime. The incidents which he has seized upon and illustrated are already prominent landmarks of such a history, and are obviously painted from a close study and familiar knowledge of their circumstances and the men engaged in them:—*Moreau and Dessoles*, on the eve of the battle of Hohenlinden; Napoleon in triumph, in "1807," and in defeat, in the *Retreat from Russia*, in 1814; the *Emperor at Solferino*, and the incident of the civil war at Paris, are the most prominent of these, and deserve to be studied in the first place by the student of the biography of Meissonier, to dissipate the common delusion that he could produce nothing but the celebrated *genre* subjects in the province of the "infiniment petits."

¹ In the catalogue *Les Joueurs d'échecs*, "sujet flamand," *Le Petit Messenger*, idem—each of them sold at 100 francs!



CHAPTER II.

THE writer of the article in "The World" runs through the various stages of the criticism that has at different times been passed upon Meissonier's work. He is speaking of the allegorical subject which was designed at Poissy during the German occupation, and intended to be of colossal dimensions :—

"The critics have hitherto said that Meissonier cannot distinguish himself on any canvas much larger than his thumb-nail. It is their last ditch, and that is no doubt what makes him so anxious to storm it. They have been talking in that way about him all along ; and, one by one, he has confounded them by doing the very things they have said he could never attempt. His earlier style, and, as some think, his best, was a frank study of character and costume for its own sake. He painted pictures without any thought of a motive, for nothing but the delight of representing simple subjects with sincerity and force. The figures that then sat to his imagination were toppers, chess-players, serenading cavaliers, bibliophiles ensconced in snug corners of seventeenth-century libraries, and so on. It was impossible to contest their supreme excellence in their own kind ; so some few captious critics declared that, while he was unrivalled in this branch of art, he could never attain to the grand style. He could do studies ; he would never do historic work. He replied by the *Diderot*, which, it is hardly too much to say, gives you the pictorial epitome of an epoch in its group of eager encyclopædists listening to a reading of the last new thing. Losing this position, his assailants took up another.

Most of his scenes were interiors, because here he found the best opportunity for the treatment of those minute accessories of costume and furniture in which he has such exquisite skill. So it struck them as an ingenious thing to say that he could do nothing but interiors, and that unless he had his subjects in a faint subdued light, he would be altogether lost. He said nothing, but quickly went to work and produced the *Portrait of the Sergeant*. Now the *Portrait of the Sergeant* is one of the most daring experiments in the painting of light, in modern art. The man stands out there in the open by himself, literally bathed in light, and he makes a perfect picture. There was one more charge to make; and somebody made it. He could paint history; he might even paint light; but he could not paint movement. (We are not now taking up these follies in their chronological order, but simply as they turn up in the memory.) He replied to this by painting the '*Rixe*.' How shall we translate it?—*The Tavern Row*—two picturesquely-attired ruffians, who have drawn on each other, and are straining in the hands of cooler-headed friends to fly together for a deadly embrace. We in England ought to know this picture, for we have the good fortune to possess it. It was Louis Napoleon's truly imperial gift to the Prince Consort. The '*Rixe*' finished Meissonier's series of triumphant demonstrations—at least it should have finished them; but, as we see, he is likely once more to be tempted out of his beaten path by the desire to prove that he can paint on a colossal scale. Let him beware: here he might find his Waterloo!"

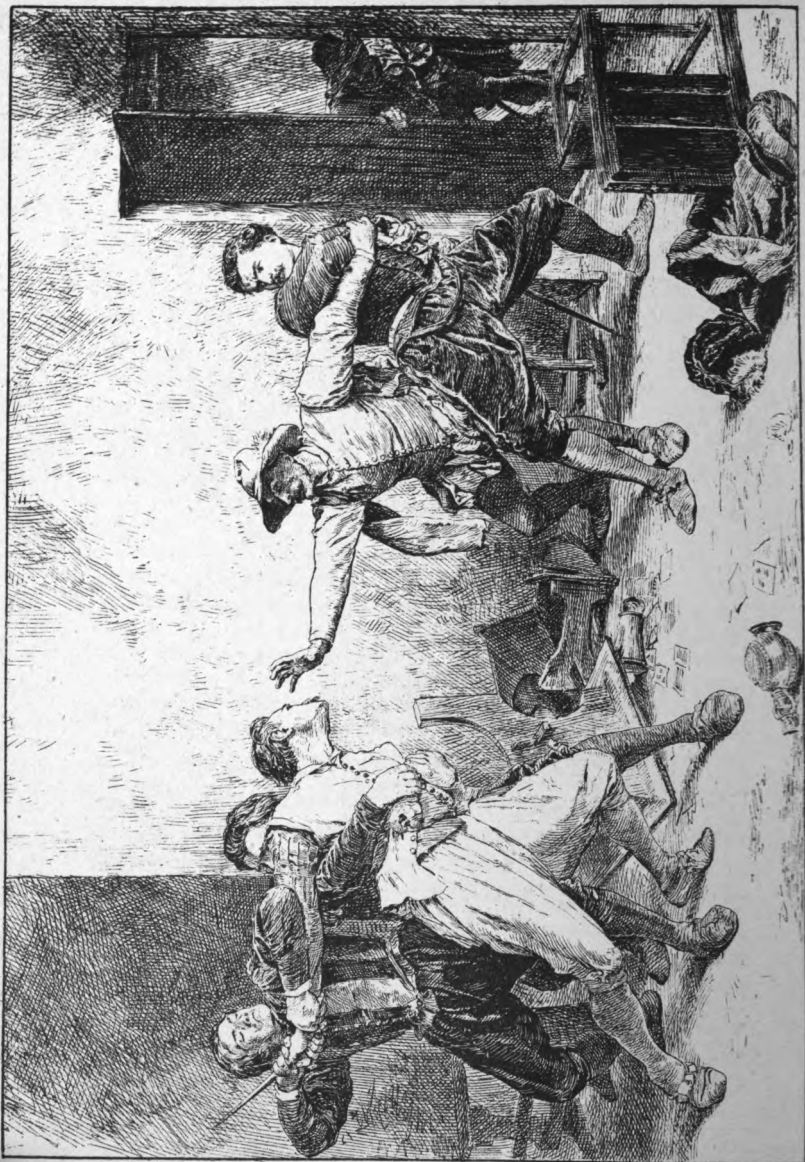
His works in the Salon of 1839, which first arrested the attention of the general public, a long time before they attracted the notice of the critics, were *The Doctor* and the *Monk at the bedside of a Patient*; obviously inspired by the sentiment of Bernardin de St. Pierre, for whose *Paul and Virginia* he was drawing illustrations at the time. These works are (as M. Gautier points out) in no way connected with the so-called "Romantic" movement of his period; they are rather, as we should say, in the manner of Wilkie, of what Bulwer calls the "benevolent" school, and are remarkable for the expression of an intensity of *sympathy*

which has subsequently disappeared from Meissonier's work.

"He had nothing in common with the Romantic movement, or the school of Delacroix, Decamps, Ary Scheffer, Dupré, Deverier, Boulanger, Roqueplan, and the rest; although the date of his appearance might seem to suggest this. His literary sympathies were with the 'École du bon sens,' he liked Ponsard and Augier, and he drew their portraits and the costumes described in their works, and put themselves into his Decameron of poets."

Of the same date is the first *Smoker* (*Homme fumant sa pipe*), and shortly later a *Buveur de bière*; the heralds of a long line of similar studies. The smokers are of two distinct types, of which we have a spirited description by M. Gautier: the first—

"Placed well in the centre of the picture, sits with an elbow resting on the table, legs carelessly crossed, and a hand thrust into the folds of his waistcoat; his head throw dreamily back. The accessories *explain* him. He is dressed in a roomy coat of antique cut and modest grey colour, bonneted with a 'lampion' carefully brushed, and swings in the air a well-shod foot with a silver buckle on the instep. He exhales, with the calm of a good conscience, an immense 'bouffée' of smoke. His measure of beer is frothing at his side. 'Satisfaction intime' radiates from his honest face, wrinkled deeply with calculations and methodical habits of the strictest probity. This is an honest man to whom you would freely entrust your cash-box! The OTHER SMOKER, dressed in scarlet, also has a pipe, and is acting in a similar manner, but his dress is disorderly and crumpled, and buttoned awry, his cocked hat is thrust down upon his forehead, his lace sleeves and his frill are plucked by his twitching fingers, the attitude of his body indicates trouble and excitement, the 'tic' (crib-biting trick) of his lip chewing morsels of clay from his pipe-stem, the hand desperately (*rageusement*) plunging into an empty pocket, all betray the adventurer, the cleaned-out gambler. He is obviously reflecting 'where the deuce can I borrow me a louis, or a five-franc-piece?'



LA RIXE.

"If we study the *locale* it tells the same story. We miss the precise grey panelling, the decent mahogany brown woodwork, and find in their place a wall that is dirty and covered with scratches, and marks of charcoal and grease proper to the obscure pothouse, and the 'taudis' of doubtful reputation."

The Salon of 1840 contained (says M. Claretie) *The Reader*, "since become famous;" an *Isaiah* and a *St. Paul* from his illustrations of the Bible of the Sieur Raymond.

In 1841 there was a typical study of *Chess-Players*, and in 1842 another *Fumeur*, and the *Player on the Violoncello*, which a friendly critic in the "Beaux Arts" declared to be worthy of Metsu and of Gerard Dou. With reference to the resemblance of Meissonier's work to that of the Dutch School of the 17th century, M. Ernest Chesneau ("La Peinture Française au XIXme Siècle") says:—

"He only took the *sanction*; he was no *imitator* of the Dutch School of the 17th century. With great patience and energy he rivalled, in their own method, Terburg, Metz, Gerard Dow, Mièris and Slingelandt; and beat them. . . . His minuteness of accuracy, which is attributed to him as a reproach, springs merely from the love of perfection, to be attained only by long and conscientious labour. . . . He is superior to Gerard Dow by his constant and careful study of *human expression*, &c."

The volume of the "Beaux Arts" for 1843 contains a wood-cut from a design by Meissonier (engraved by Orrin Smith) of a religious piece, an *Adoration*, with a remarkable design of ornamentation on the frame. A collection of Meissonier's designs in decorative art would be valuable and interesting. As we have already mentioned, the edition of "Paul and Virginia," to which he contributed illustrations, abounds with the most beautiful specimens of his work in this branch.

His principal pictures for 1843 were the *Amateurs of*

Painting,¹ and *The Painter at his Easel*² (*Le Peintre dans son Atelier*), and a *Portrait d'homme*. The friendly critic of the "Beaux Arts" describes the former of these pictures as :—

"A *chef d'œuvre* of six inches in size, at the most ; twin-brother to the *Violoncello Player* and the *Chess-Players*—a painter of the last century—Greuze, perhaps—seated in his studio, which is hung with sketches, drawings, and finished pictures on the wall, in front of his canvas, and putting the finishing touch to a new work. His whole attention, mind and soul, are engrossed by his painting. Seated behind his chair are the two amateurs—the Paul Ferrier and the Paturle, of 1765—watching his work." Of the *Portrait d'homme* the same writer says : "It makes us regret that the man who was happy enough to sit to such a painter, had not taste enough to induce a young lady to sit in his stead. We do not assert that this gentleman, with his grey trousers, his *embonpoint* 'plus que naissant,' his corpulence and his aged features, is absolutely disagreeable to look at ; on the contrary, he has, for his friends, a frank and hearty expression, which tells of a life of happiness, and would beautify the ugliest features ; but it is nevertheless certain that M. Meissonier would have been better pleased if his subject had been the smiling head of some beautiful child," &c.

Amongst the works noticed in the Salon of the year 1848 are a *Guard House* ; a *Young Man looking at Drawings* ; and a *Game of Piquet* ; and, in 1849, the *Skittle-Players* (*La Partie des Boules*) which is regarded as a *chef d'œuvre*. M. Gautier describes the first of these, *La Garde Bourgeoise flamande*, as :—

"A subject analogous to Rembrandt's celebrated *Sortie of the Banning Cock Company* : brave citizens, caparisoned in buff, armed with halberts, advance towards the spectator with a *de-bonnaire* awkwardness worthy of such soldiers. What an

¹ Sold at the Khalil Bey sale, in 1868, and bought by M. Léon Say, for £1,272.

² Sold at the Lehon sale, at Paris, in 1861, for 11,200 francs.

example is this of the infinite variety of art! That which Rembrandt overwhelms in fitful shadows, interspersed with reflected lights, Meissonier isolates, detaches, expresses with precision and detail; and each of them produces a masterpiece!

In the Salon of 1852 were *Sunday*, and *An Incident of Civil War*,¹ by Meissonier. At this period the critics of the old school were thoroughly aroused on the subject of what the Comte de Viel-Castel, writing in the "*Athenæum Français*," calls "the invasion of the miniature" in every department of art.

"The sentiment of grandeur," he says, "is lost to our epoch. Nowhere but in the Salons and the churches are there any broad walls fit to receive monumental works of painting and sculpture; and the artist, living in a contracted world, degrades his art to the proportions imposed by the mean necessities that he is subjected to. Some painters there are who still struggle to resist the invasion of the miniature—such as Glaize and Gallait. But the painters of *genre* and of marine subjects are daily wasting their talents upon little works which are assured of their sale. These artists are not required to wait for encouragement, they have *the public* who are their 'liste civile.' Under the pressure of circumstances art grows little, and in diminishing its proportions it loses its breadth, &c. M. Meissonier is an artist of great talent. M. Plassan and M. Fauvilet, his imitators, are refined and graceful, but they are founding a school which will be lost in a dry and minute *miniaturism*, and will give birth to 'imperceptible painters,' who will send to the exhibitions works in imitation of Van Blarenberg.

"The school of Meissonier studies the arrangement of accessories, the texture of stuffs, &c., and a still-life to which 'la Nature vivante' is only introduced as a accessory."

The same critic writing on the Salon of the following year, 1853, which contained Rosa Bonheur's celebrated

¹ This last was subsequently exhibited, in 1863, at Brussels, and a writer in the "*Chronique des Arts*" alludes to it as having figured in the Salon of 1850-51.

Horse Fair, and Delacroix's most important work of the *Pilgrims of Emmaus*, painted in the manner of Rembrandt, and from Meissonier *A Man choosing a Sword*, a *Young Man Studying*, *The Bravos*, and the scene from the "Decameron" of Boccaccio (*à l'ombre des bosquets chante un jeune poète*):

"A different school of *genre* painting is represented by Messieurs Fauvelet, Plassan, Fichel and Chavet. These four artists, at whose head is M. Meissonier, pass their lives contemplating nature through the small end of a telescope. Stuffs, gildings, interiors of rooms, play a principal part in their compositions, and they generally select the 18th century for their theatre." Of *The Young Man Reading*, he says, "The figure and accessories are treated more artistically; the fineness of detail has not impeded a certain breadth of the whole, and the light is well distributed."

The Bravos, which M. Gautier describes as one of the most important compositions of the master, containing a whole drama in two figures, was in the International Exhibitions of Paris in 1855 and of London in 1862. It represents two murderers, in an attitude of strained suspense, waiting for their victim to emerge from a door in front of them. It was exhibited in the collection of Sir Richard Wallace, at the Bethnal Green Museum, in 1872. I have before me the photograph of a *Chess-Players*, signed and dated 1853. It represents an elaborately-wrought interior of an artist's studio, richly furnished, but in great disorder and uncarpeted; a large picture on an easel seems to be falling forward and supported by the richly-brocaded arm-chair of one of the players; the dress of this figure, and the chair coverings, are elaborately worked with flowered designs. An ecclesiastic, with one of those thick long clay pipes of France which are such singularly disagreeable smoking, seems to be claiming a victory in the game. A fine Scotch deerhound is peacefully slumbering on the

boarded floor. The general effect is one of great richness and profusion of ornament, which does not, however, divert the attention from the central action admirably conveyed in the attitudes and expression of the players.

The panel picture from the "Decameron" is important among Meissonier's works, from the circumstance of its containing a number of female figures. It is quite in the manner of Watteau. It represents four or five ladies listening to the recitation of a poet, who, on a bench in the background, is reciting his verses to the accompaniment of a guitar. A loving couple are wandering in an affectionate posture to the shadows of the wood. In the foreground some fruits diaper a table of white marble with their velvety colours. Some noble specimens of dogs are introduced. The whole picture is most beautifully delicate and refined, and, free from the mannerism of Watteau, rivals in all other respects his best productions of the kind.

Another important picture of this year was *Moreau et Dessoles—M. et son chef d'état D. avant Hohenlinden*, representing a bleak and desolate snow-covered landscape, the clearing of a forest, on a high hill. The two generals have advanced to the edge of a precipice, and are surveying the field of battle with a glass. Two sergeants mounted hold the horses at a short distance; the trees are bending under a strong gale of wind, the horses turn their tails towards the wind, the cloaks of the generals are fluttering before them like flags, and one feels alarmed lest they should be carried over the cliff. This painting is an admirable example of Meissonier's power in the treatment of atmospheric effects, and of imparting to a landscape a sentiment harmonizing with and intensifying that of his subject.

A critic in the "Athenæum Français," writing in 1854, says :—

"Many talented artists since 1836" (obviously the year of Meissonier's introduction) "have been ruined by their connection with literary men, inspiring their work from books and poems rather than from the traditions of their art. They have grouped themselves under a representative master, in imitation of the poetical and literary movement of the period. The last traces of this epidemic remain in certain bizarre groups; *e.g.* the Sect of the Regenerated Antique, or the pagans of colour; a sort of 'école de bon sens' of painting; the party of the 'Chatoyants,' honest people, who conceive they have done everything when they have represented the trailing of a silk robe upon marble stairs, and to whom a plumed imbecile playing a guitar, while he dips his feet in a *vasque*, is the height of the picturesque; the *nichée* of the *infinitely little*, headed by *M. Meissonier*."

The writer is M. Charles Asselineau; and a very similar strain of criticism is adopted by a "foreign correspondent" to the "Athenæum" of about this date (March 24, 1855), who, after deprecating with considerable discretion and judgment, in a general way, the rage for novelty that is chronic in France, unfortunately falls foul of M. Meissonier:

"'I can't be original in cookery (*en cuisine*): I will be so in carpentry,' soliloquises M. Meissonier, who has founded what may be called the Infinitesimal School. 'I will make the smallest panels that ever were made. I will paint the Days of June—the whole of that terrible and sombre scene—soldiers and insurgents, streets blocked up, barricades stormed and bloody—all on a surface not larger than my hand.' Is not this original—very original? Down comes the amateur with his money; up goes the *Io pæan* of criticism!"

But the *Io pæan of criticism* had yet to be heard, and M. Meissonier was making his method prevail in the teeth of adverse criticism. We shall very soon now have the pleasure of recording a period of unanimous tergiversation in this respect; and, to make that pleasure the greater, it is worth while, at the risk of tedious iteration, to put first

upon record a final protest, in the "Athenæum Français," made by the Comte de Viel-Chastel, on the occasion of the collection of the works of Meissonier, and his now firmly-founded "School," at the Universal Exhibition of 1855. After a very scholarly allusion to the manner in which the Fine Arts, "the hieroglyphic poetry of their period," pass the same changes and vicissitudes, and have their periods of decadence and renaissance together, with poetry:—

"Now," he says, "they renounce the idealization of matter, after having renounced the idealization of thought, and sacrifice to painted and carved records of material facts: they flatter the passions of the mob whom they court, and condemn the pencil and the chisel to the *unintelligent* reproduction of all that the artist can see." (I have put the "words of prejudice" in appropriate italics.) Alluding to the renaissance of the Christian School in Germany—"Not produced by *vulgar* admiration of *brutal* reality, but rather by exaggerating the idea, the dream, at the expense of the form; of the poetry, at the cost of the execution," he calls the contrary tendency now exhibited in the French School, "a new theory destructive of all art, by the exorbitant pretension of liberating it from *every* rule, from *every* idealization. The Exposition Universelle finds the new school of the Trivial rising up on the field of battle, protesting, by its tendencies and its works, against all the illustrations of modern art: denying art, genius, inspiration, poesy to hold to an impossible 'calque' of Reality."

There is no doubt that the Count was a representative critic; or that the followers of Overbeck (who boasted that he *never* used a model) had no place in their minds for Meissonier.

M. Meissonier elected to be represented at the Universal Exhibition by four small panel paintings, *La Rize*, the *Bravos*, *La Lecture chez Diderot*, and the *Skittle Players* (*Joueurs de Boule sous Louis XV.*), all of which have been already alluded to.

I will, however, insert here an interesting description of the *Diderot* picture, from the pen of Mr. Charles Blanc. It appeared in a feuilleton of the "Temps," in 1867.

"On a canvas of a few centimètres, he presents us with a whole group of philosophers of the seventeenth century; amongst whom we seem to recognize Baron Holbach, Grimm, D'Alembert, and Diderot himself, with his friendly figure, his eye so prompt to brighten with the fire of genius. In the attitudes and expressions of the reader and his hearers, the degree of attention is marked in each. Diderot stands in the foreground, leaning upon a chair which he is balancing to and fro; another is bending over a manuscript and eagerly attentive; a third, in an abstracted mood, has thrown himself back in his chair, putting his little finger into his ear; a fourth, behind the table, is leaning against the library shelves, and the different bindings are distinguished, some of them faded and worn, and a row of small volumes, bound in red, with white labels, yellow with use.

The criticisms of M. Edmond About are always lively and independent, but representative of a high order of thought. He says:¹—

"Since the Salon of 1852, M. Meissonier, although he has by no means abandoned his pleasure in 'tours de force,' has shown that he is not alarmed at a larger canvas, and was not lost in the middle of a vaster frame. The same perfection of finish that formed the charm of the smaller pictures was found in *The Rixe* and *The Bravos*, with the addition of vigour and energy, I had almost written of *rage*. His talent has grown with his pictures, and if he is always to progress in this proportion, I would advise M. Meissonier to borrow a great canvas from M. Horace Vernet, or from M. Diaz . . . hélas! To cover M. Meissonier's pictures with gold pieces simply, would be to buy them for nothing; and the practice has now been established of covering them with bank notes. Messieurs Chavet, Fauvelet,

¹ "Voyage à travers l'Exposition des Beaux Arts, 1855." Edmond About.

Plassan and Andrieux follow 'spiritually' the manner of M. Meissonier. Their pictures do not sell badly, and in a short time no others will be saleable, for life is drawing in its limits, and apartments are growing smaller every day. M. Pezous is a Meissonier on a smaller footing, with a great deal less in his drawing and a little more in his colour."

In the Salon of 1857 we find the *Confidence*, *A Painter*, *A Man in Armour*, *An Amateur of Pictures in the Studio of a Painter*.¹ The first of these, which M. Gautier apostrophizes as "a pearl and a marvel among pictures," is one of those dramatic efforts in which, as in the *Bravos*, an incident of romantic interest is narrated thoroughly, by sheer force of expression, in a most simple and obvious method. It represents a young man, "*L'Amoureux candide*," foolishly and exuberantly confiding the secrets of his heart to a hardened *roué*, middle aged, who is plainly bored by the confidence. There is more than talent, there is a great deal of *pathos* in the picture, to those who have not lost their sympathy in the generous illusions of youth.

Of the same year, 1857, is the *Drapeau*, a finely-posed figure of a young man, in armour to the thighs, supporting the immense folds of a standard. He has a classic head and short curled hair and beard, and the whole form would bear comparison with any productions of the school of the idealized "antique." The picture was in the Demidoff sale, in 1862, and is described in the "*Chronique des Arts*" of that date.

The *Amateur of Pictures*—a blonde young man, in black breeches, white waistcoat, and coat of rose-coloured taffeta, examining a drawing from a portfolio on a chair—was

¹ The official catalogue gives also *L'attente*; *Un homme à sa fenêtre*; *Jeune homme du temps de la Régence*; *Portrait d'Alexandre Batta*; *Joueurs d'échecs (dessin)*.

originally in the Morny Gallery, and was sold at a sale in Paris, in 1863, for 9,400 francs. The *Man in Armour* of 1857, an upright figure, helmeted, cuirassed, with yellow sleeves, grey breeches, and red stockings, the left hand on the guard of his rapier, and holding a lance in the other, was sold in Paris at an auction held in December 1861, for



LE FAUCON.

From the "*Contes Rémois.*"

9,000 francs. A *Harquebusier*, in grey buff, red stockings, felt cap, upright, shouldering his weapon, also of 1857, was sold in January 1862, for 6,100 francs. A picture of 1858, *Soldiers at Cards*,¹ 27 by 21 centimetres (the Demidoff one),

¹ Sold by the artist for £1,000, and, at the Wertheimber sale, bought by M. Demidoff for 28,000 francs. Sold at New York, in 1876, for 11,500 dollars.

representing a band of "Reiters," in the great hall of a fortress, has a likeness to the works of our English Cattermole.

A critic, dissatisfied with it—it is curiously divergent from Meissonier's usual *finesse* of style,—says: "M. Meissonier has accustomed us to more freshness in the shadows, more air in the background, more freedom in the composition, and especially to less *vulgarity* (*banalité*) in the choice of subject and sentiment." In effect it is a typical work, representative of a side not sufficiently illustrated of Meissonier's versatile genius. It reminds us of the work of Rembrandt, and there is something quite remarkable in the manner in which the lights and shadows are utilized to heighten the facial expression of the figures. The features of the loser, who sits with his back to the light, appear *en silhouette*, while the bland mockery of his smiling opponent is placed opposite to a strong light. On the back of the mount of the photograph of this picture before me, M. Meissonier has written: "ce tableau a été fait pour Lord Hertford en 1858."

About this period M. Meissonier was much noticed by the Emperor, and we read in the "Gazette des Beaux Arts," of September 1859, that he was at that time just finishing the sketch of *The Battle of Solferino*; and had received a commission for another historical picture of the meeting of the two Emperors of France and Austria, on horseback; and was about to *return* to Italy to take the sketch on the precise spot where this historic incident occurred, and to proceed from thence to Vienna to take the portrait of the young Emperor.

In January, 1860, a very remarkable exhibition was held on the Boulevard des Italiens, of modern works of art lent by private collectors, for the benefit of the Caisse des Secours, or Artists' Benevolent Fund; "which," says M.

Gautier, "did not contain *one* bad or *mediocre* picture." Here the progress of the "Romantic School," created in Meissonier's early days, was represented in an interesting collection of examples of various epochs: of Bonnington, Delacroix, Décamps, Jules Dupré, Theodore Rousseau, Bou langer, Isabey, Robert Fleury, Camille Roqueplan, Diaz, Riesener, and others; whose works, remarkable for brilliance and intensity of colour, seemed to clothe the walls with a glowing and luxurious tapestry, and contrasted strongly with the cold, pale colours for which the annual exhibitions at the Palais de l'Industrie had been remarkable. Other leading masters of the French School represented at this Exhibition, were: Ingres, Hipp. Flandrin, Meissonier, Gudin, Troyon, Rosa Bonheur, Brascassat, Isabey, Ary Scheffer, Marilhat, Charlet, &c.

"Never," says M. Gautier, "was the work of Meissonier more favourably represented: he is there in every shade of his genius, and with the most curious variations of style. The little world of his creation is increased with new and welcome inhabitants. Signor *Polichinello* makes his entrance among the studious and sedate amateurs, painters, smokers, beer-drinkers, violoncellists, and others. Besides the *Decameron* we have there the *Nephew of Rameau*, one of those drinkers, 'qui jettent la bouteille après le premier verre; qui cassent une pipe après avoir fumé,'" &c.

There were several repetitions of the *Polichinello*. I have before me a photograph of one, a specimen of animated wood or wooden humanity, bedizened in satins and embroidery, with immense bows of ribands at the knees; a thing half man and half doll, sprawling on futile legs, and obviously pendent from the back of his neck; his hands are clasped over his ridiculous stomach, his club is hugged under his arm, and he cocks his head, surmounted by a tall fool's cap, at an angle, and grins at the spectator with a pucker in the left eye in the highest degree ludicrous. On

the back of this photograph M. Meissonier has attached a pencil memorandum in his own writing:—"Ce tableau a été peint par plaisanterie sur une porte. La peinture a été coupée à la vente de la personne qui possédait la porte. Sir R. Wallace l'a achetée." This is the *Polichinel on panel*, which figured as the number 521 of the works exhibited at Bethnal Green in 1872. Another *Polichinello* (if not the same) is mentioned in a sale of the modern pictures belonging to M. Alexandre Dumas fils, in 1865, where it was bought for £280.

M. Meissonier had always a habit of occupying himself in drawing upon any material that lay at hand in his moments of enforced inaction; and M. Claretie mentions a publisher with whom he had dealings in his youth, who made a practice of keeping him waiting in an ante-room in which the table was supplied with pencils and strips of paper, which M. Meissonier regularly covered for him, without noticing what he was doing, with valuable sketches which the ingenious publisher as regularly converted into money.

The *Nephew of Rameau* mentioned by M. Gautier is a production of the year 1860; it represents merely "a man at a table smoking a pipe," but it is an immortal character-sketch worthy of Velazquez himself. It is the typical vagabond, or OTHER SMOKER, described by M. Gautier (see page 26).¹ Among the most amusing of the critiques evoked by the Exhibition in 1860, is that of M. Cordier, in the "Beaux Arts," who is humorous on the subject of Meissonier's selection of a period in the past century, and prophecies that in the future:—

"Genius, never satisfied with the present, will find its subjects in memories of 1860, which will render it dissatisfied with 1960,

¹ See "Gazette des Beaux Arts," Feb. 1860.

which, in its turn, will be envied by 2060, and so on *ad infinitum*. Our ghosts, one day returning to an Exhibition of the next century, will be singularly flattered to read on the labels of pictures *two or three inches in diameter* such inscriptions as 'A Critic composing an Article for a Review,' 'A Young Man mixing his Absinthe,' or 'A Lecture *chez* Alexandre Dumas.'

Carrying out the comparison of Meissonier with Watteau, suggested by the *Decameron* subject in this Exhibition, he goes on to say: "M. Meissonier has not selected the pleasant and lively features of the age of Louis Quinze; he takes no delight in those delicious butterfly scenes of bright colours gaily glittering in the sun, voluminous silks falling in a thousand pleats and shining like the facets of a diamond. The false but elegant life, of which Watteau painted the pleasures, with its 'grandes dames coquettes, filles rieuses,' and young lords glittering with gold: all that 'cohue fanfreluchonnée' has been far from his mind; he has seized upon one idea, to represent the minute details of real life in its working aspect. He is not the painter of the *fêtes galantes*, but of the life of labour, of the life which existed with, and finally overwhelmed, the festive existence of last century. He is not to be seduced by rouge and patches; philosophers and artists are his subjects, men elaborating thought in the silence of labour."

It will now be observed that thoughtful writers began to regard the message of Meissonier as something secularly significant,—beyond the mere accident of a change of fashion and tendency of art,—representative of a wave of progress in the civilization of the nation.

M. Chesneau, also a thoughtful writer, dealing with the subject from this point of view, shows how the Romantic School represented by Delacroix was too earnest, too frankly sentimental, for the character of the nation, and speaks of the realism of the Dutch School, represented by Courbet, as a transition between what he calls the *heroic* and the *human* periods of French art.

— "France, from geographical position and the character of her people, always vacillating between the North and the South, has had her *heroic* period with Poussin, Lesueur, Lebrun,



THE FLEMISH SMOKER.

David, Ingres, and even with her last great artist, Eugène Delacroix, whose genius was but a variation of the ancient classical tradition. Twice or thrice her art has struggled to enter into the *human* period, and has failed to do so, in spite of the efforts of the brothers Lenain, of Chardin, and of Géricault. To Courbet is to be attributed the continuation of these efforts," &c;—

And their triumph to Meissonier, whose work combining artistic with so-called literary excellence, completely overshadows such productions as the *Demoiselles de Village*, and the *Casseurs de Pierres*, of Courbet.

M. Chesneau makes the happy remark, that whereas there is breadth and grandeur in Meissonier's smallest panels, David and his school had the art of imparting *littleness* to (*rappetisant*) canvases of the greatest dimensions. He points out that the work of David was always cramped by the shackles of tradition and heartless conventionality, and that of Meissonier, elaborated in search of an ideal perfection by long and conscientious labour,

"Evidences a superhuman patience, an unconquerable longing to do well, a persistence and continuity of purpose in his mind, most rare in themselves, and in him happily combined with a constant study of the expression of feeling in humanity, and especially of the refinements of the intellect (*esprit*). Thought, meditation, serious or wandering, of the philosopher or of the lover, have supplied him with motives for the most charming, often pathetic, compositions. He can express in his art the sensual satisfaction of the musician, and the naïve indications of foolishness (as in *The Confidence*)," &c.

The official catalogue of the Salon of 1861 mentions *The Emperor at Solferino*; *un maréchal ferrant*; *un musicien*; *un peintre*; *Portrait de M. Louis Fould*; *Portrait de Madame T*—¹ The *Solferino* was not however ready. At

¹ Madame Henri Thénard. It was one of Meissonier's fourteen pictures in the Universal Exhibition, 1867 (see page 42).

the private view a jealous critic, M. Lamquet, expecting that it would be admitted by favour after the appointed term, cries :—

“At the moment we are writing this article, M. Meissonier's picture has not arrived. Why this favour refused to so many others? If a little more time was to be granted to any, it should have been to those whose reputation was still to make.”

M. Jules Claretie speaks in enthusiastic terms of Meissonier's excellence as a portrait painter “*pénétrant et vivant* ;” and makes this excellence an answer to such criticisms as that of M. Cordier (see page 39), objecting to his choice of a period in the past century, “when Meissonier paints modern and contemporary persons,” he says, “*il est plus contemporain et plus moderne que personne*.” The portrait of Mdme. Henri Thénard is also adduced, as an additional instance, confirming that of the *Decameron* and his illustration work, of his excellence in painting women.

“What pretty rose tints beaming with life and truth! What a study of drawing and painting that hand veined with blue! what a charm, touched with melancholy, in the features! And when the beautiful *Titianesque* girl that he is finishing shall be exhibited, it will be seen what a painter of women is this man, who designed the exquisite and seductive figures in the ‘*Contes Rémois*’ of M. de Cheigné.

“The *Portrait of M. Delahante*, among many others that he has signed—such as those of his son, of M. Fould, of M. Battu, and others—is one of the most ‘*solides*.’ The man is powerful, of athletic build; but there is a touch of refinement still in this ‘*taille de colosse*.’ He luxuriates more in vitality than in ‘*embonpoint*.’ The head is full of energy and a latent gaiety.”

This *Portrait of M. Delahante* was one of the works by which Meissonier was represented in the Exhibition of 1867. In the background of the picture was a miniature reproduction of the *Charge of Cuirassiers at Friedland*, in the picture called “1807” (described on page 54).

Of the works of the year 1861, there is another *Card Party*, the figures of which might be taken for English cavaliers of the civil wars, distinguished by long hair, flapping boots with great spurs, slovenly costume, and a character of free-hearted, reckless gaiety. Each of these figures is a remarkable study in itself of the expression of character and emotion, not in the features alone, but in all the details of attitude, costume, and, in short, individuality. A contrast to this roystering scene is *The Audience* (engraved for the "Gazette des Beaux Arts," 1861, by Ch. Carey, a pupil of Tony Johannot), illustrating the polished punctilio of an official reception; and a third, totally different subject of the same date is *The Blacksmith* (*Le Maréchal ferrant*) drawn from Meissonier's illustration to the "Contes Rémois," a scene of humble life, in the open air; a blacksmith shoeing a patient old cart-horse—(Meissonier's horses are simply perfect for anatomy, expression, and *texture* of their coats)—in a picturesque corner of a yard, where vines clamber about a trellis overhead, and soften the light with their green and partial shade. It was one of the pictures exhibited in London in 1862.

The "Beaux Arts" (not the Gazette), formerly, as we have seen, so friendly, was very severe upon Meissonier in the criticisms of the Salon of 1861—and says of this picture:—

"This is one of the *infiniment petits*; with much pains we have discovered in it, great skill in the composition, great refinement (*finesse*) in the details, but not the least kind of perspective;" and of *The Musician*; "he is well posed and is handling his instrument with ease; which must be all the more difficult for him to do, because the floor is on a slope, like that of a gothic roof, and he is in danger of slipping down it and breaking his neck: the pieces of furniture charmed with his melody are all dancing on different legs; 'mais Amphion en a

bien fait d'autres!' There is less perspective in this picture than the other."

M. P. Buchère, to whom we owe this criticism, was engaged at the time in a series of articles in the same journal upon the subject of *Chinese Art*, which may have complicated his study of the Laws of Perspective.

Towards the end of 1861 Meissonier was elected to the Academy, in place of M. Abel de Pujol. This honour was contested by M. Auguste Hesse, a former holder of the "Prix de Rome." The "Chronique des Arts," December 8, 1861, makes a curious allusion to this election, as though the specialists were not yet reconciled to the popularity of M. Meissonier, won without their help:—

"However great the talents of M. Hesse, he is not nearly so well known as his competitor, and it must be admitted that a great *notoriety* is, in itself, a motive for preference. According to the list drawn up by the Section for Painting, it is evident that the majority of votes obtained by M. Meissonier, were given to him by the Sections of Architecture, Engraving, and Music; that is to say, by those who, being unconnected with painting, represent *public opinion*: the sentiment of the world at large."

M. Ernest Chesneau comments upon the circumstance, as fortunate, that Meissonier was not called upon to pronounce an eulogy upon his predecessor in the academical chair, who differed, in his views of art, *toto cælo*, from himself; and had "adopted and diverted towards religious painting the narrow tradition and cold conventionality of David."

Extracted from the official catalogue of the English International Exhibition, 1862 are

187. The Student.	{	le Comte de Morny.
188. Breakfast.		
189. H.M. the Emperor at the Battle of Solferino (<i>not sent</i>).	{	H.M. the Emperor of the French.
190. H.M. the Emperor Napoleon I.		H.I.H. Prince Napoléon.
191. The Bravos.		le Comte de Morny.

Mr. F. T. Palgrave says in his remarks introductory to the official catalogue of the French School, that

“England possesses, in the domestic branch of subjects, no painter equal in truth and tenderness of feeling to Edouard Frère. His works, with those of Plassan, Trayer, Troyon, and others, display another excellent national quality; tact and ease in telling the story, and a determination not to exceed the limits of the style adopted by the artist.”

But he does not mention Meissonier.

At the exhibition of the “Cercle de l'Union Artistique,” held in the Rue de Choiseul in 1862, Meissonier was represented by the *Corps de Garde*, the *Lecture chez Diderot*, already mentioned, and another picture called *Le Capitaine*, representing a veteran officer in military costume of the 17th century, descending a baronial staircase, with an air of mingled familiarity and swagger in the highest degree humorous. An article in the “Chronique des Arts,” May, 1863, adds that to these were subsequently added a copy of the *Napoleon during the Campaign of France*, the property of Prince Napoleon; which was painted “en camaieu gris,” and sold to M. Delahante for the price of £1,000.

The “Gazette des Beaux Arts” of this year (1862) contains a very good etching by Flameng of a picture, then just completed, *La Halte*, and an able commentary upon it by M. Léon Lagrange:—

“This is such a picture as we would fain have more frequently from M. Meissonier. Each figure, man or beast, has its own very remarkable individual value; and all combine in one common action composing an animated scene. The necessity of grouping together a number of living figures has stimulated the efforts of the painter in search of expression; and the necessity of binding a variety of tones has stimulated his study of colour. The white horse is mounted by a man dressed in blue; the bay, by a man in green; the black, by a rider in

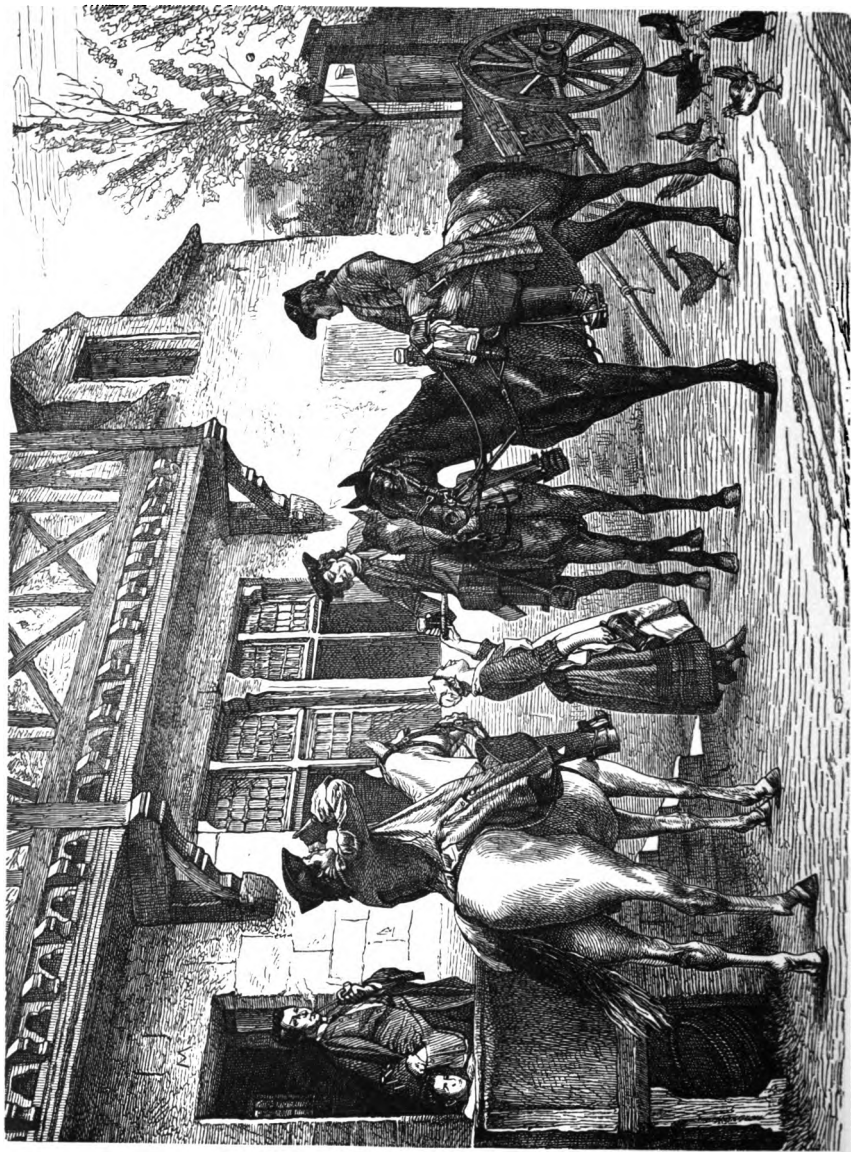
red. The red roof of the inn, the dress of the man smoking, the grey robe of the woman, the white linen, the poultry, the walls, the trees, are so many separate notes mingling through light demi-tints to a harmonious *ensemble*."

This picture was painted for the Duc de Morny. On the photograph of this picture M. Meissonier has written the following interesting note: "Ce tableau a été acheté primitivement par M. de Morny, qui quelque temps après l'avoir acquis m'a prié de l'agrandir: pour lui être agréable j'ai fait ajouter du bois au panneau. Il a du être acheté à la vente du Duc par Lord Hertford." It was exhibited at Bethnal Green, under the title of *Travellers halting at an Inn*. It has the French alias of *L'Auberge*.

In 1863, on 19th April, a notice in the "Chronique des Arts," informs us that M. Meissonier had "that moment" finished the *Battle of Solferino*. In the same journal it is recorded, in July, 1863, that this picture, although it was inserted in the Catalogues of the Salons of 1861 and 1863, and in that of the English International Exhibition of 1862, had *not appeared at either*. It was, however, at that date, 1863, on view in the studio of M. Bingham. It was exhibited in the Salon of 1864, and the International Exhibition of 1867, and is now in the Luxembourg Gallery.

It was one of the pictures by which Meissonier was represented at the Brussels Exhibition of this year. The others were the *Souvenir of the Civil War*, 1850-51, and the *Young Man reading near a Window*, which had been sold at the Le Hon sale of 1862. Both of these last-named pictures were at that time the property of Mr. Van Praet. The last must be the picture originally christened the *Bibliophile*, a picture described by M. Gautier—

"Of Meissonier's golden age, of Louis Quinze, when men wore full curled wigs, or powdered hair drawn back, giving every-



THE HALT. BY MEISSONIER. In the Hertford House Gallery.

one a disguised air and appearance of being made up and middle-aged.

"The young man turns his head towards his book; the daylight is fading, and the grey of the evening is seen in the sky outside, the shutter being partially closed."

In 1861, Meissonier made the illustrations to a new edition of the "Contes Rémois," by the Comte de Chevigné, of which there is a friendly notice, illustrated with cuts, in M. Piot's "Cabinet de l'Amateur." M. Piot informs us that the Comte de Chevigné secured the co-operation of Meissonier at a lavish price, and ensured the success of his publication by doing so. Of the illustrations, specimens of which will be found at pages 36, 49, 61, 69, &c., M. Piot says:—

"*La Culotte des Cordeliers* and *Le Mari Matinal* carry our memory back to the pretty etching of *The Smoker*, made for the first number of our 'Cabinet de l'Amateur,' now twenty-two years ago; and looking at *Le Bon Docteur* and the *Cinq Layettes*, we are again in his society of *Philosophers* and *Chess-Players*, whose honest faces redeem the character of the calumniated eighteenth century; and was it not yesterday that English and French buyers were contending at the Hotel Drouot for possession of the persons of the *Gros Dogue*, *De par le Roi*, or the *Falcon*?"

Le Bon Cousin is the original idea of the picture of *Le Maréchal ferrant*, of 1861 (described on page 43). *La Culotte des Cordeliers* is given on page 69, and *Le Bon Docteur* on page 49 of this work. *De par le Roi* was a characteristic scene of a company of Harquebusiers knocking at the low vaulted door of a mediæval house. Other fine illustrations in the "Contes Rémois" were *Le Mari Borgne*, a crowded scene of a wedding-party emerging from the church, where doubtless the ceremony had just been completed; *Le Mari Matinal*, an enthusiastic amateur gardener, digging in

an open flower-garden, with a gabled mansion in the background; and *Le Pèlerinage*, a landscape scene in a finely timbered park, with two female figures of peasant girls.

The year 1863 was marked by the death of the great leader of the Romantic School of painting, Eugène Delacroix. He died on the 13th August, at the age of sixty-four. He made his *début* in art, in 1822, with a masterpiece, the *Barque of Dante*, and exercised probably more influence on the course of the art of his country than any other living painter of his time.¹ M. Jules Claretie tells us that "the painter whom this impassioned (*fougueux*) and vast genius loved and admired above all others, was Meissonier. 'Meissonier,' said the author of the *Massacre de Scio* one day, 'est le maître le plus incontestable de notre époque.'"

We are indebted to M. Claretie for an account of the following incident:—Another *Souvenir of the Civil War*, called *La Barricade*, was standing in M. Meissonier's studio one evening that Eugène Delacroix had dined with him. "C'est superbe!" s'écria l'auteur de la *Barque du Dante*. "Vous trouvez? Eh bien, dit Meissonier, si cela vous plait, prenez-le!" and Delacroix carried home the *Barricade*.

¹ Ferdinand Victor Eugène Delacroix was born at Charenton, in 1799; his father had been minister during the Directory, but he was left very poor; he studied under Guérin, and soon became a chief leader of the Romantic (or Anti-classic) school [see page 26]. In 1822 he exhibited the celebrated scene from Dante's "Inferno," now in the Luxembourg Gallery; in 1834 decorated the Chamber of Deputies with allegoric figures, and exhibited the *Battle of Taillebourg*, now at Versailles; in 1848 he decorated the Chamber of Peers; his paintings are very numerous.—(C. C. Black.) Those exhibited to the British public at Bethnal Green, in 1872, by Sir Richard Wallace, are well-chosen specimens of his power in pathos and expression, the *Death of Marino Faliero* and *Faust and Mephistopheles*.

At the Delacroix sale¹ it was bought, for 3,600 francs, by M. Steinhell, the brother-in-law of M. Meissonier, who offered it at the same price to M. Reiset, for the Louvre. M. Reiset, after some hesitation, declined, and M. Steinhell subsequently re-sold the picture for 6,000 francs. M. Claretie adds that the picture was never exhibited excepting



LE BON DOCTEUR.

From the "Contes Rémois."

at the Delacroix sale; it cannot therefore be the same *Souvenir of the Civil War* that figured at Brussels in 1862. The frank interchange of gifts of such value is characteristic of the friendship that existed between the two great masters.

¹ The catalogue of this Sale is one of the valuable collection of Art Sale Catalogues in the Art Library at the South Kensington Museum.

In the "Cabinet de l'Amateur" of 1863, M. Eugène Piot remarks:—

"The much-affected crowd of artists who thronged to the obsequies of M. Eugène Delacroix, saw with pain that no official recognition was added to this public mourning. Let us close up our ranks ('serrons-nous') around our illustrious dead; let us study to make their funeral honours worthy of France and their own genius! Indifference gains upon us on every hand, and every day narrows the fatal circle within which French art is perishing (ce cercle fatal où l'art français agonise et se meurt)."

The Salon of 1864 contained the two greatest of Meissonier's series of eight pictures, illustrating the "Napoleonic cycle" (as M. Claretie calls it); from the defeat of the Austrians at Lodi in 1796, to the retreat from Russia, or the campaign of France, in 1814.

With reference to the refusal of the jurors to award the medal to Meissonier on this occasion, M. Edmond About says (*Salon de 1864*):—

"The painters have been more naïvely *personal*, if one may say so, in their decision than even the sculptors. Not having a single deceased member to reward; fearing beyond anything else to do justice to Meissonier, who has exhibited two master-pieces, or to two or three other eminent artists such as Jules Breton and Amaury Duval, they have had the heroism and the egotism to declare that there would be no 'Grande Médaille' awarded. And for fear that public opinion would force their hand at the end of a fortnight's exhibition, they juggled away the medal of honour on the 6th of May, six days after the opening. . . . Two admiring groups, incessantly renewed from the time of opening the doors until the closing, indicate the places where Meissonier's two pictures are hung. And it is to these two pictures that the jury has refused the Grande Médaille! It was awarded to M. Yvon some years ago. And Meissonier has not had it. Oh Frenchmen of Paris! Athenians of the La Villette suburbs! You do not deserve great

artists, as you do not know how to reward them! . . .
 . . . We had *five* painters in the year of the Exhibition of 1855, who held in their sphere the rank held by Scribe in the drama, or George Sand and Dumas in romance, or Rossini and Auber in the musical world. Death has since robbed us of three—Decamps,¹ Vernet, Delacroix; and two are left, Ingres and Meissonier.

“A bourgeois notion is abroad in certain classes that Meissonier’s genius consists in painting very little pictures. His principal merit, on the contrary, is that his work is greater, and especially more solid, than that of our *soi-disant* historical painters. . . . Look at the *Emperor at Solferino*. The principal personage, posted in front of his staff, is looking on at the battle as a cool player studies a chess-board. A score of officers around him, all like himself on horseback, are waiting his orders. In the distance a regiment is seen escalading, in order of battle, a breastwork crowned with poplars. On the right, in the foreground, some artillerymen are manœuvring their guns, the corpses of a French soldier and two white Austrians, torn to rags by some explosion, show where the battle has passed by. Even if you have no knowledge to appreciate the truth of drawing, the solidity of execution, sincerity of colour, the picture will impress you profoundly; it will be greater in the tablets of your memory than it is within its frame. You understand now, perchance, for the first time, the movement—tranquil and profoundly melancholy—of a general staff, that mainspring of battles. In any case you will be charmed with the truth, the simplicity of the characters, &c.

“Now, having studied this familiar *victory* ‘presentée sans emphase’—recross the room and look at the *Retreat of 1814*. It hangs exactly opposite to make an antithesis. It is also a picture of a general staff, but of a staff in defeat. Napoleon

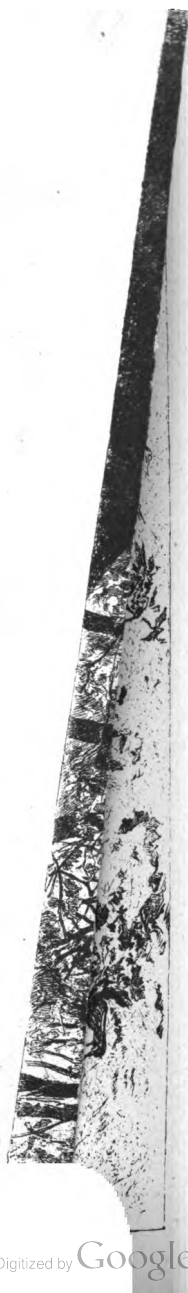
¹ Alexandre Gabriel Decamps was born in Paris, in 1803; he studied under Bouchat and Abel de Pujol; he disliked severe classicism, and preferred a realistic style; painted much in Turkey, the Levant, and Egypt; and shows a fondness for introducing scriptural figures in his Eastern sketches. He died at Fontainebleau, 1860.—(*C. C. Black.*) Sir R. Wallace is the possessor of a large collection of his works, principally of Scriptural or Oriental subjects, and a number of water-colour drawings, the whole of which were exhibited at Bethnal Green Museum in 1872.

conquered, but firm and resigned, is at the head of a group of the generals and marshals of France. His fine head is crowned with that 'auréole de malheur,' which outlives all other crowns in history. In a melancholy manner he presses his horse along a road where the snow is heaped up and stained and trampled by the wheels of the tumbrils and the feet of the soldiers of the army. This road of the French campaign is the lamentable track on which our fortunes were spilled. A grey sky hangs like a shroud over the disgrace of the favourite of the gods. The companions of his glory—for none has yet betrayed him—follow him sadly, sick in body and soul. A chilling wind makes them shudder beneath their cloaks. We recognize Drouot, M. de Flahaut, Berthier, who is sleeping in his saddle and sinking with fatigue. The hardest of all is Ney, 'nature rustique,' he will certainly never die of cold. The body of the army is advancing in a crowd, 'en tas, en pâte, sur une ligne parallèle.' The eye distinguishes muskets, drums, rags. This troop of obscure heroes appear to be closing up to each other in their distress for mutual warmth. But the ranks are unbroken; it is a retreat, not a disbandment; the enemy would still find 'à qui parler, s'il tombait sur ces gaillards-là!' Never, I think, has Meissonier been better inspired than this year; never has he attempted such great things; never has his genius taken so high a flight.

"You may criticise, in the *Solferino*, a certain appearance of *décousu*, which is the effect of the cannon smoke spread here and there in white patches," &c., &c.

M. Claretie informs us that, for the "1814" picture, Meissonier borrowed the identical coat of Napoleon from the "Musée des Souverains," and had it copied by a tailor with "une exactitude Chinoise;" crease for crease, button for button. He then put it on himself, in his studio, and, sitting on a wooden horse saddled in imitation of the white charger of the Emperor, he studied his own figure in a mirror. M. Ph. Burty found him in this attitude one day, stifling in a hot summer's day, under the heavy "redingote," studying the fall of the skirt over the crupper of his wooden horse.

THE HALT.



He also prepared in his studio, with infinite pains, an arrangement of a miniature landscape, strewn with a white powder resembling snow, and models of tumbrils and waggons on heavy wheels, which he drew through the lanes of his powdered landscape, that he might study the furrows and the fall and deposit of the scattered snow at leisure.

Mr. F. G. Stephens, in his "Flemish and French Painters," mentions that the Emperor Napoleon, engaged at the same time upon his "Life of Cæsar," used similar methods of models of Roman encampments and strategic works, to produce in his mind a full realization of the scenes he wished to describe.

In either case, and in the case of the so-called pre-Raphaelite school which had its time in England, the conscientious labour and minute study of detail so cheaply censured by those who are too vain or too idle to submit to it, produced results in immortal works which are finally judged by the elevation of their general aim and its successful attainment; and not by the valuation of their parts, as the critics hostile to this method assume. The pre-Raphaelite works of Millais, Holman Hunt, Walker, and others, live by the soul that is in them; and there are no works of Meissonier which contain a deeper sentiment and a better refutation of the common accusation against him, of want of feeling, and contentment with material ends, than these Napoleonic pictures of "1807," and "1814," and *Solferino*; upon the details of which he expended such an unsparing amount of labour.

In the number of "L'Art," for January, 1876, there is a very full notice of the two Napoleonic pictures, "1814" (*La Rétraite de Russie*) and "1807" (*Friedland*)—illustrated by several enlarged cuts of the details—from which I have extracted the following:—

"1807," like "1814," is a page of history, but it is of triumph. The *Retreat from Moscow* showed Napoleon returning painfully across the steppes, covered with snow, under a low grey sky, followed by his staff, gloomy and discouraged. It was the crumbling of the Imperial fortunes. Here, on the contrary, we see their culmination. Buonaparte is at the apogee of his power. The whole scene is glistening in the light of the sun of victory; its radiance floats over the plain and the horizon, and enfolds the army in a vast aureole; the cuirasses scintillate, helmets glitter, the swords reflect lightnings from the sky—and yet, simultaneously with this scene of triumph at Friedland, who shall count the stifled sobs of France? The painter has addressed himself to the expression of this idea. Look over the vast plain stretched out 'à perte de vue,' barren of foliage and of vegetation. The burning breath of the cannon has consumed and ruined it all. No—one field of rye was left verdant, and *that* now is being ruined—trampled under the feet of the triumphant army. The Emperor, on a rising ground, is surrounded by his staff, amongst whom are his marshals, Bessières, Duroc, and Berthier. Although he is in the middle distance, he is the soul of the picture, and fixes the attention and the look of the spectator, towards whom he appears to be advancing. On his left and rear, Nansouty is waiting with his division for the signal to defile; further back is seen the 'Vieille Garde,' with their grenadier caps and white breeches; behind them, squadron after squadron of troops, and an infinite perspective dotted with men as far as the eye can follow it into the distance."

A principal feature in the foreground of this picture is the charge of the regiment of cuirassiers, passing at full gallop in front of the Emperor, who salutes them; and each, as he passes the mound on which Napoleon stands, turns round and rises in the stirrups, and waves his sword in the air. As M. Claretie says: "L'élan, la fougue, l'emportement de tout ce régiment au galop, voilà qui est admirable et intraduisible."

The picture deserves to be re-christened from the significance of this incident alone, "*Morituri te salutant!*"

Meissonier is said to have worked upon this picture for fifteen years: he modelled all the horses in wax, and every figure was drawn from the life. It was sold to Mr. Stewart, of New York, for about 300,000 francs.

A very humorous character-picture of the year 1865, is called *Une Chanson*, and represents a scene in a spacious guard-room, heavily vaulted like a crypt, and rudely furnished with a wooden table and benches. A soldier of the sixteenth century, apparently passing through a sentimental stage of drunkenness, is sitting on the table, with a guitar of many strings, and chanting at the top of his voice a song of a melancholy or maudlin character; his comrade, astride of the bench, is listening and watching with a comical expression of amusement. *L'Ordonnance*, of 1866, is a very celebrated picture, and is also a military piece, of the period of the Revolution. It represents three figures of soldiers in the richly decorated ante-room of some palace, or private mansion, their temporary quarters; and an orderly delivering a despatch. The officer, with his back to the fire, reading the despatch with all the arrogance of ephemeral rank, is the ideal of Scott's inimitable creation, Dugald Dalgetty. The soldiers wear long plaited locks of hair and pigtails, and the details of the costumes and the furniture are almost microscopically rendered, and the textures and the "chatoyants" effects are such as Meissonier alone can produce. Of the same year, 1866, is the picture of *Marshal Saxe and his Staff*, which was sold, at a sale in New York, for 8,600 dollars.

In the Salon of 1866, two pictures of M. Charles Meissonier were spoken of with very favourable criticism, containing, M. Edmond About says, "a little of the brilliancy which 'superabounds in the work of his illustrious father,' and attracting attention not only for the spirit that

they display, but for the special qualities of a painter which the public recognizes in them."

Our narrative has now arrived at the great year 1867; when, as M. Théodore Duret remarks (*Les Peintres Français en 1867*), the Universal Exhibition of living artists at the Champ de Mars, and the Annual Exhibition of the Champs Elysées; the Exhibition of the works of Ingres at the "Palais des Beaux Arts," and of Théodore Rousseau at the "Cercle" of the Rue de Choiseul; and the Private Exhibitions of MM. Courbet and Manet, brought under the eyes of the public a series of works of French painters, which permitted a judgment to be passed on the school in general and the principal characteristics of its members.

It was at the Annual Exhibition at the Champs Elysées of this year, that M. Fichel came forward with a picture in the style of M. Meissonier, which attracted a great deal of attention, and of which the "Athenæum" says:—

"Among *genre* pictures of this peculiar kind, M. Fichel occupies, in the absence of M. Meissonier, a prominent place with his capital *Amateurs before a Picture*: an old subject, but filled here with new matter."

Of the same year is M. Meissonier's *Cavalry Charge*; sold to Mr. Probasco, of Cincinnatti, for 150,000 francs.



CHAPTER III.

I HAVE before me a collection of magazine notices, in all the languages of Europe, of the Fine Arts Section of the International Exhibition of 1867. The painters of England and France appear to have entered into the rivalry of this occasion with all

“ The stern joy which warriors feel
In foemen worthy of their steel ; ”

and the critics of each nationality are patriotic in their valuations.

An example of the conduct of their polemics on the side of the French, is given by the “ Times ” correspondent, who afterwards turns round and retaliates :

“ One wise critic declared that ‘ when he came to write about the English pictures he was in a difficulty ; for, properly speaking, there *were no* pictures, and there *was no* school of painting to write about. Nevertheless, as a chemist would undertake to analyse any unknown substance put into his hands, no matter how unpleasant to his senses, he would undertake to examine this not very pleasing nondescript which the English painters put forward as Art.’ ”

I have not been able to discover the original of this quotation, or it would have been interesting to analyse the national idiosyncrasy that the foreign critic objected to. The “ Times ” correspondent considers that all the foreign

nations showed in their collections the influence of the French style, and that there were, properly speaking, only two distinct schools of art represented: the English and the French; but that the character of the French art was to be described as "the formulated wisdom of a school;" to which, rather unhappily, he applies the name of *chic*. Alluding to the organized system of training arranged for students of painting in France, under the bureaucratic direction of the Government, he says:—

"We see more of *chic* in French pictures than in English, because the influence of School is more felt in France than in England. It is suggested to the young French painter what he shall see in Nature, and how he shall paint it; there is a danger, ever afterwards, that he will see and paint nothing else; and he has more or less of *chic*, according as he follows more or less freely the receipts of the School to which he belongs."

The system of Government patronage of the fine arts in action in France at this date, was the subject of a great deal of comment in pamphlets and magazine articles, of which the following is a specimen:—

"The State alone is in a position to maintain the arts in the loftiest phase of their development, and its intervention, disastrous in all other quarters, is indispensable in this; for this reason it grants a subvention to the lyrical and literary theatres of the first order, and maintains the unrivalled establishments of Sèvres and the Gobelins. The 'Grand' painting is essentially in the same position; it can only subsist with the support and encouragement of the State. But what is the Government doing? It is abandoning the class of ideas of which it ought to be the guardian, even if all the world else deserted them; and is redoubling the impulse of the '*gout bourgeois*,' by appearing, with its own purchases and rewards, as a competitor to the buyers of easel pictures. In acting thus it is blind to the elementary fact that this kind of painting has sufficient encourage-

ment of its own, from the profits that it gives to its authors, without State intervention."—*Les Beaux Arts en 1867, par M. Raymon.*

These remarks have reference in part to the patronage of Meissonier and his followers, by the purchase of their works for the Emperor's presents. An English critic, of the same date, says that "the thirty-five or forty pictures marked as presents from the Emperor, are unquestionably the very worst in the collection."

In the jury awards of the Exhibition eight grand prizes were allotted in the first two classes of the first group, which comprised not only paintings in oil, but other paintings and drawings. Of these, four went to French jurors, and the other four to foreigners: Kaulbach, of Bavaria; Knaus, of Prussia; Leys, of Belgium; and Ussi, of Italy. After these great or exceptional prizes, about sixty lesser ones of three different grades were decreed, out of which one of the first order went to Mr. Calderon; one of the second, to Mr. Erskine Nicol; and two of the third to other Englishmen, Messrs. Orchardson and Walker; and some little scandal was created at the time by the circumstance that Meissonier, Gérôme, Cabanel and Rousseau,¹ who were all upon the jury, all obtained grand prizes, while the other French painters on the jury, Fromentin, Bida, Français and Pils, were also distinguished by medals.

"While in some of the classes we have suffered through the jurors themselves being disqualified for prizes, in the department of painting, where it was of most consequence that such a rule should prevail, we have to complain grievously of the operation of the opposite rule. *Of the eight great prizes for painting, all of them were taken by jurors.* It is hardly sur-

¹ Born 1812. Pupil of Gros and Bertin; well known as a landscape painter. Died 1868.

prising, in these circumstances, that four fell to France and none to England.

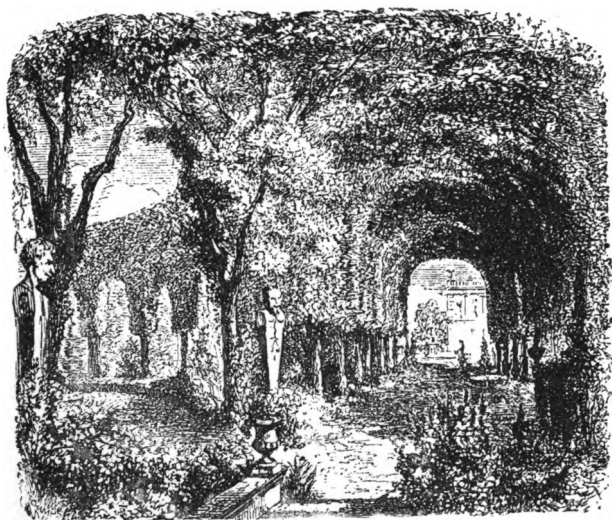
"Besides the eight principal prizes, there were sixty others of three different grades, of which only four were given to Englishmen."—*Standard*, July 3, 1867.

The English jurors, however, frankly repudiated the imputations thrown upon the acts for which they were responsible with their colleagues; but they, on the other hand, were accused of indifference and inaction in the matter. There were twelve jurors of the French, and only fourteen of other nations. The "Times" correspondent makes the following comments upon the awards of the "grands prix":—

"Wonderfully minute are the works of Meissonier, and they convey a great number of facts in a very small compass. But, after all, what are these facts? What does he really tell us of the joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, loves and hates of human kind? Much as we may admire his little bits of painting, does he ever touch our hearts? He never attempts to do so. All that he attempts is to bring a number of extremely placid people before us, sometimes singly, sometimes in groups; all these placid people are remarkable for faces of the hottest colour, and so far as there is any activity of interest in the pictures, it is only the activity of light and shadow—the play of colour in dress and furniture. This play of light and shadow, and graduating and interchanging colours, is often very pretty and sometimes very true;" (this is an obvious plagiarism of M. du Viel Chastel's allusion to the School of the *Chatoyants*) "but it would not be difficult to take picture after picture of Meissonier's, and to show his lapse from truth and the failure of his *chic*. There is the little picture marked 162, where the French General Desaix, with the Army of the Rhine, is represented as giving directions. There is such a want of air in this picture that a curious illusion is produced in it. There is a bay horse in the middle of it with its quarters to the spectator. Some thirty feet on this side of it there is a soldier pointing to something, who has his arm raised above the croup of the horse. That arm seems to be in the same plane with the

horse's head, instead of being thirty feet on this side of the horse's tail. . . . There is the *Battle of Solferino*: the treatment is unusually hard, and as for the subject, if it be indeed a battle, it is a battle at such a safe distance that no one need know anything about it."

It is amusing to turn back from this criticism to the description of the picture, by M. Edmond About, given on



LE MALENTENDU.

From the "Contes Rémois."

page 51. The writer next attacks Gérôme, who, he says, "is not afraid to grapple with a moving theme; but the only themes that he thinks moving are themes of lust or horror." The celebrated *Phryne before the Judges*, less in the nude figure than in the features of the judges, had a revolting intention that would have degraded the most consummate perfection

of technical skill. Of Cabanel's *Paradise Lost*, he asserts that, "the sole motive of the picture, notwithstanding the solemnity of the subject, was the display of Eve's legs." Rousseau was a landscape painter, and he compares his works unfavourably with those of Mr. Vicat Cole. And in this manner the battle of the critics was waged.

Their attention, however, is on both sides more generally directed to the schools of "*high, historic, and sacred art*," at that period everywhere in perigee (and especially so in France, since the death of Delaroche, Ary Scheffer, and Flandrin); or to the so-called *romantic* school extinguished with Delacroix; or to the *realistic* school led on by Gérincault. (The mere vocabulary of the classifications is bewildering, and the selections of representative leaders are as diverse as the definitions of the catch-words that are used.) M. Meissonier, however, *und voce* escapes classification. He is regarded by none as either *high*, or *romantic*, or *realistic*; he is certainly never accused of *cold classicism*, nor, on the other hand, is he an "ardent realist." When it is desired to speak evil of him he is mentioned with a mob, as one of them; but no two among the critics select the same associates or imitators of him. Mr. Beavington Atkinson, in the "Contemporary Review," says:—

"There are no more sparkling pictures in the whole world than the small cabinet works of Meissonier, Plassan, Fichel, Vetter, Toulmouche, Duverger, Frère, Hillemacher and Leleux," and proceeds to point out his cleverness in the treatment of trivial subjects, his *heartlessness* as compared especially with Edouard Frère; "each of these painters, however, is avowedly inimitable *in his way*."

But Meissonier's he has shown to be a worthless way. Mr. H. O'Neil, in the "Fortnightly Review," less tenderly

minded, attributes the "increasing popularity of French Art" to the circumstance that—

"Its professors content themselves with small efforts, attempting only what is capable of being effected *without much thought or labour*," (this of Meissonier!) "The subjects generally are of the most trivial nature, requiring none of the highest powers of the mind in their elucidation. Such are the works of Meissonier, Fichel, Plassan, Chavet, and what may be termed the boudoir school. . . . When, however, they attempt anything of a wider range, as Meissonier, in his picture representing the *Emperor at Solferino*, the result is a failure. Meissonier's art is always too positive, metallic, hard, and deficient in air; and his faults are all the more conspicuous when he attempts a composition of more than a few figures."

The pictures of Frère, of Jules Breton, of the Prussian Knaus, and of the Dutchman Israëls, are everywhere commended for the quality of sympathy and pathos, which is with almost equal unanimity assumed to be absent from those of Meissonier. In the "Quarterly Review" of this date, there is a short and lively article, headed the "Pictures of the Year," in which comparisons are drawn between *pairs* of representative painters, English and French: Edouard Frère is opposed to Mr. T. Faed, R.A., who has the English desire of finding a *moral* in everything (like Alice's "Countess," in Wonderland), and, in his eagerness to teach a lesson, misses the Frenchman's charm of simplicity. The humour of Knaus is, on the other hand, pointed out as a quality which separates him entirely from the French school, who "in painting unaccountably neglect the comical side of things." The above are the principal criticisms that affect Meissonier,—as to pathos and humour, *quot homines tot sententiæ*, and almost the same may be said of the technical stricture as to his paintings being too "positive, metallic, &c.," but the imputation that he painted

without thought or labour appears to be rash, and answerable by a reference to facts.

From the Official Reports made under the direction of our own Government by Mr. Cope of the Royal Academy, I extract the following :—

“The number of oil pictures exhibited by France is no less than 625. France has, in fact, considered this as a great international competitive trial of strength; and we find that galleries, palaces, churches, and museums have poured forth their treasures to swell the amount of works, and to assert the supremacy of France in matters of taste. The works were most carefully selected out of (it is stated) the number of 10,000, by a jury composed of the very ablest painters in France.”

After noticing the absence of representatives of the severe classic style of David, and the gap caused in the branch of religious or Christian art by the death of Ingres and Hippolyte Flandrin, and the failure of Cabanel to maintain this style, Mr. Cope goes on to add :—

“But if we turn in another direction, and inquire into the condition of the modern ‘romantic’ and ‘*genre*’ school, we get a very different result; for we find a long list of names of very excellent artists. Conspicuous among them are Meissonier and Gérôme. The former contributes fourteen, the latter thirteen works; and, although their pictures are of cabinet proportions, they may be considered the principal upholders of French art in the Exhibition.

“As excellent examples of the talent of Meissonier, may be mentioned the following pictures, although all of them are more or less stamped with his peculiar microscopic genius: *The Emperor at Solferino*, one of his most complete and important works; the extent of space, the minute accuracy and finished drawing, the variety of character in the figures of men and animals, the quiet grey sky, and the spirited execution, are all admirable. Equally good is *Napoleon I. in Russia*: the severe, leaden, cold sky; the advancing Emperor and his staff, muffled and stern; the tramping mass of troops in the middle-distance;

and the broken, hard, cloddy ground, half covered with snow, are excellent.

"The same qualities are equally apparent in the natural look and truth of effect in the picture of *General Desaix* listening to a peasant who is giving intelligence. The simple action and character of the countryman are as characteristic as the group of generals round the fire in the country wood.

"In his pictures of figures somewhat larger in scale, Meissonier is less excellent, and we miss that peculiarly focussed look which is one of his great excellencies; as, for instance, in his *Portrait of Mr. G. Delahante*, and, in a lesser degree, in his *Lecture* and *l'Ordonnance*."

Extract from the official catalogue of the Exhibition :—

Meissonier (Jean-Louis-Ernest), né à Lyon, élève de L. Cogniet. Méd. 3^e cl., 1840; 2^e cl., 1841; 1^{re} cl., 1843, croix de la Légion d'honneur, 1846; méd. 1^{re} cl., 1848; gr. méd. d'honneur, 1855; officier de la Légion d'honneur, 1856; membre de l'Institut, 1861. A Poissy (Seine-et-Oise).

- 449. *L'Attente*. Salon de 1857. Appartient à Mme. Meissonier.
- 450. *Le Maréchal ferrant*. Salon de 1861. App. à M. Bianchi.
- 451. *Portrait de Mme. Henri Thénard*. Salon de 1861.
- 452. *S. M. l'Empereur à Solferino*. Salon de 1864. Musée du Luxembourg.
- 453. "1814," *Campagne de France*. Salon de 1864. App. à M. G. Delahante.
- 454. "1807."
- 455. *Lecture chez Diderot*. Appartient à M. P. Demidoff.
- 456. *Le Capitaine*. App. à M. le Marquis d'Hertford.
- 457.¹ *Cavaliers se faisant servir à boire*. id.
- 458. *Corps de Garde*. id.
- 459. *Portrait de M. G. Delahante*.
- 460. *Lecture*. Appartient à M. X—.
- 461. *l'Ordonnance*. Appartient à M. Prosper Crabbe.
- 462. *Renseignements: le Général Desaix à l'armée de Rhin et Moselle*.

The Exhibition of 1867, the culminating incident of the Empire, may be regarded as that also of the triumph of the career of M. Meissonier.

¹ Cav. à la porte d'une auberge, or *La Halte*, mentioned on page 45.



For good or for evil, it was abundantly evident that his influence had come to prevail at this date very widely, not in France alone, but throughout Europe; in the absence of Delaroche and the other great masters recently deceased, he had become *de facto*, if not *de jure*, the tacitly recognized leader of French Art. The critics would not have it so, to whom he represents the ultimate verdict of the "uninstructed people," and the fallacy of cherished traditions, but his success was already too plainly on record to be ignored by them.

In the pompous closing ceremony of the presentation of the prizes by the Emperor, his *Battle of Solferino* was the central object of the Art Trophy erected in the space cleared for the ceremony, along with works of Reimers, the Russian painter; Knaus, of Prussia; Rousseau, the French landscape painter; and others. In the subsequent exhibitions of the Salon, Meissonier is represented rather by the works of his pupils and imitators than by his own. During the war he laid down his brush and joined the army as a volunteer. Interesting anecdotes will, no doubt, be brought to light in his memoirs; of his adventures on this occasion, and of his narrow escape of being shut up in Metz with General Bazaine; and there is no doubt that a much larger work than the present might be filled with a retrospect of his work under the Republic.

A valuable sketch of the course of the French School in general during the decade that intervened between the two International Exhibitions of 1867 and 1878, is given in a re-publication of the letters written by M. Lafenestre to various journals, on the annual Salons.¹

¹ L'Art Vivant. La peinture et la sculpture aux Salons de 1868-1877.



LE HÉRAUT D'ARMES DE MURCIE.

From "Paris-Murcie"—Numero unique, Dec. 1879.

It opens gloomily in 1868, when the writer is alarmed at a lethargy, or a spirit of hesitancy, or a subservience to passing fashion, in the disciples of the two great leaders, Ingres and Delacroix, recently deceased :—

“ Powerful as were these great masters, there was in each of their methods (*organization*) a vice that opened a door, in the face of their works, to false theories in art. Under the pretext of *STYLE*, the pupils of Ingres become careless in their study of luminous effects, of solidity of forms, and of truth of *relief*; and those of Delacroix, engrossed in the pursuit of *COLOUR* harmonies, have rapidly lost their respect for truth of drawing.”

This is the eternal balancing between the cold classicism of form and the sensual cultivation of colour, that besets the mere student of a school in art, and from which the man of genius escapes by his apprehension of the higher qualities of “sentiment and expression.” The equally well-known separation of the *peintres émus* and the *peintres habiles*, supplies a better test for the detection of a genius that will survive its contemporaries, and seize, as Meissonier has done, the sympathies of the uninstructed *first*, and the critics *afterwards*.

In the Salon of 1869 M. Lafenestre finds his hero, destined to redeem the French school by a bold idealism, in M. Chevenard, whose works are very resembling in character the grand religious subjects of our Mr. Herbert, R.A.; but he gives a good part of his attention (though obviously *contre gré*) to the steadily prevailing style of Meissonier. He makes his criticism of a picture, in minute proportions by M. Detaille (whom he alludes to as a *pupil* of Meissonier), the occasion of separating the works of Meissonier himself, and of those really appreciating his influence, from the crowd of imitators who are producing

little "scenes of family life unworthy of the interpretation of painting," or fitter for illustration by the "*prestesse du crayon*."

"A picture ought, in the first place, to be a picture, *i.e.*, to charm the sight by harmony of colours, accuracy of drawing, logic, and composition. A fine touch of the pencil, a lifelike attitude, an effect of true light, are worth more in a picture than all the ingenious subtleties and delicate refinements of the finest wit. An interior of Chardin, not larger than a hand, will be often more interesting than a most complicated melodrama of Greuze. . . . The influence of M. Meissonier, strikingly obvious in the case of M. Detaille, re-appears in most of our painters of familiar subjects; it is not a thing to be surprised at or to complain of. M. Meissonier, an artist of understanding (*esprit*), has never fallen into the error commented above. He has never *confounded the literary with the picturesque*. His pictures are valuable as pictures; not on account of their subjects (which, for the most part, are common and insignificant), but for the vivacity and the precision of their execution. His imitators—imitators though they be—have therefore always a chance of being artists; for they have acquired of him the habit of looking at the *expressive side of nature*."

The English public had never a better opportunity for the study of the history of the development of the French school of painting, and Meissonier's position in it, than was afforded by the Exhibition of the collections of Sir Richard Wallace at the Bethnal Green Branch of the South Kensington Museum, in 1872; and the contemporary notices (which we have not space to transcribe) are full of instructive commentaries on this exhibition. It was as obvious on this occasion that Meissonier was *facile princeps* in his own style, and that his genius was independent of any preceding school or master; as it had been in 1867 that his influence was spreading widely in France and Germany, as well as in England and the rest of Europe.

Those who were accustomed to the closer study of the works of Mr. Millais, found much analogy between his methods and tendencies and those of Meissonier, a resemblance carried into the details of their work, and especially obvious during the pre-Raphaelite period of Mr. Millais's



LA CULOTTE DES CORDELIERS.

From the "Contes Rémois."

career, in their common quality of utter conscientiousness in detail. The works by which M. Meissonier was represented, were the *Polichinello*, of 1860 (mentioned on page 38); *Throwing Dice*; *The Connoisseurs*; *Napoleon I. and Staff*; the *Visitors*, the picture mentioned on page 11 as being the first exhibited by the artist at his début in 1834; *A Cavalier of the time of Louis XIV.*; the *Decameron* scene

of 1853, described on page 31; *St. John in Patmos*; *The Roadside Inn*; a *Sentinel* and a *Cavalier of the time of Louis XIII.*, and a *Musqueteer of the time of Louis XIII.*; the *Bravos*, of 1853, described on page 30; *Gamblers*, and *La Halte*, or *L'Auberge* (see page 44). It will be seen from this catalogue that Sir Richard Wallace may claim to possess a perfectly historical series of Meissonier's work, representing each of the different phases of his art.

The "Gazette des Beaux Arts," for 1873, contains a series of ably-written articles, by M. René Ménard, upon the collection of M. Laurent Richard, in which the movement of contemporary French art was illustrated by well-selected examples. The school of landscape painting was the most thoroughly represented in this collection, which included eleven pictures of Théodore Rousseau, twelve of Jules Dupré, six of Troyon, four of Corot, besides specimens of Diaz, Ziem, Fromentin, and Marilhat, and was thus a most interesting field of study for the illustration of the "epoch" of 1830 to 1860. But, although landscape was the chief subject represented, it was not alone; Eugène Delacroix, Decamps, Millet, Meissonier, and, among the artists of another period, Chardin, Prud'hon, and Gericault were there, in works which, far from affecting the homogeneity of the whole collection, represented identical efforts in another direction to those in landscape.

Meissonier's two representative pictures in this collection were the *Joueur de Guitare* and the *Soldat sous Louis XIII.*

"The *Joueur de Guitare* is of M. Meissonier's favourite class of subjects, but he does not interpret it in the Dutch manner. Terburg or Mieris would have introduced an audience, and placed a young person in satin by the musician's side, with an accessory individual in the background. All the world knows that M. Meissonier is not fond of painting women, and the

number of those that figure in his pictures may be counted upon your fingers. The guitar-player is alone, in a room decorated with subject tapestries, and studying his piece of music alone. He is a young man in a blonde wig, dressed in a *haut-de-chausse* tied with streaming ribands, and a chemisette of swelling sleeves. On the red cloth of the table at which he is seated are a few papers, a glass, and a metal ewer, the refined and conscientious execution of which must be appreciated by the lovers of art. Still the *ensemble* of this picture is defective in that precision which is generally characteristic of the artist; and we find in the other specimen, the *Soldat sous Louis XIII.*, a firmness and decision which are more clearly expressive of the real temperament of the painter.

"Conceived in a tone of colour that is almost metallic in its brilliancy (conçu dans une tonalité éclatante et même un peu métallique) the *Soldat* is a 'tableau type' in the *œuvre* of Meissonier. Every detail is emphasised, and the spectator may pause and examine each with the microscope, in admiration of the dexterity of the execution.

"But this is a merit of secondary degree, and Rembrandt was right in his saying that 'painting is not made to be smelt at.' Poussin, who agreed with Rembrandt in this respect, used to say that, to see a picture to advantage, you should stand at a distance from it equal to three times its size. Let us examine this work of M. Meissonier upon these conditions, and, putting on one side the magnifying glasses, let us see whether it fulfils the programme of the artist: to paint grandly on a canvas of microscopic dimensions.

"First, we are struck with the proud bearing of the soldier, who is standing erect in a paved courtyard, with a thin cane in his right hand, his left resting on the hilt of his sword. His felt bonnet, slightly thrown back, is plumed with red and white feathers; he wears a broad white collar which falls over a steel gorget, a buff jerkin, red breeches, and big boots. The head is painted with extraordinary firmness, and, fine as the execution is, there is in every part of it a decision of touch which accentuates the niceties of expression without any trickery, &c."

The criticism is accompanied by a very pretty vignette engraving of the *Soldat sous Louis XIII.*

At the Vienna Exhibition of 1873, M. Meissonier was represented by the Napoleonic pictures, "1807" and "1814," and *Solferino*, the *Peintre d'Enseignes*, the *Tournebride*, the *Petit poste de grand' garde*, the *Partie de Boules*, the *Route de la Salice aux Antibes*, and the *Fin d'une partie de cartes*. The Vienna "Tageblatt" calls him the "ace of trumps" of the French Section of Fine Arts; and his seven pictures "the constellation of seven stars of the Fine Arts Gallery."

The French School generally was, in the opinion of everybody, admirably represented in its own section; and its influence (as in 1867) in the galleries of other countries; and M. René Ménard says, in the "Gazette des Beaux Arts:—" "Although we may not completely approve the tendency of art with us, yet we cannot but acknowledge that Europe follows us wherever we go."

In Germany especially it was noticed at this time that easel pictures had completely banished the great symbolical school of Cornelius and Kaulbach. The leader of the German artists in this direction was rather M. Knaus than Meissonier, but the influence of Meissonier on Knaus during the residence of the latter in Paris, must have been important, if not absolutely decisive.

It would be useless to carry the record further. As I have stated before, on the authority of M. Claretie, we are promised memoirs in due time from M. Meissonier's own hand. In the meantime, all that could be added is recent in recollection of the public, and that which is not public—M. Meissonier's patriotic devotion and adventures during the war, his domestic and personal experiences of more recent date, and so forth—have, it is to be presumed, been withheld from publicity at his own desire. For he lives in

the full light of popularity and eminence, and surrounded by friends; and the imperfect sketches of his life that have appeared in pamphlets and periodicals are numerous, though they all deal with the subject under a reserve that it is obviously not yet the time to break through.

THE END.

NOTES.

It has been announced that an exhibition of the works of Meissonier is to take place in the new building of the *Société des Aquarellistes*, near the Madeleine, Paris, in the spring of 1882.

A series of photographs of Meissonier's "*Œuvres complètes*" is now in course of publication in parts.

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